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# **THE RUSSIAN THEATRE**



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English issue.*

# THE RUSSIAN THEATRE

ITS CHARACTER AND HISTORY

*WITH ESPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE  
REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD*

*By*

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*Translated by*

PAUL ENGLAND

WITH 48 ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR  
AND 357 IN HALF-TONE



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## **PART I: HISTORICAL**



## PREFACE

**A**MONG all nations, and in every age, the theatre has invariably been the faithful mirror of the social conditions of the time; more especially does this hold good of the development of the theatre in Russia. The Russian people, since the time of their enforced Europeanization at the hands of the early Romanovs, have been almost totally lacking in those artistic mediums through which other nations have managed to express their feelings. For instance, though Russia has certainly produced isolated instances of great musical talent, she has no distinctive school of music, and the same may be said of architecture and the fine arts; in modern times it is not possible to speak of a truly national style of architecture, or of a Russian school of painting and sculpture. Consequently the only means left to the Russian people for the expression of their intellectual powers and aspirations have been literature and the theatre; and in these two departments Russia has become the model for the whole of Europe, so that to-day it would be impossible to think of either the literature or the theatre of the West without reference to the far-reaching effects of Russian influence.

We must remember that in Russia all cultural efforts during the last two centuries have been inspired by the spirit of revolt, of resistance to existing conditions, and it is possible that here we have the secret of that irresistible influence which Russian literature and the Russian theatre have exercised over the rest of the world; their art, begotten by the powerful spirit of revolt, is actuated by a passionate rebellion against fate, coupled with a pathetic consciousness of their own shortcomings.

Whereas other nations can point to historic epochs of tranquillity, during which it was possible to look back with satisfaction and pride on the achievements of the past, the history of Russian culture, in even its most prolific periods, has nothing to show but a spirit of protest and discontent. The artistic revolution in Russia, then, as we shall see, does not start with the recent political catastrophe; its beginnings are to be sought for in the records of the centuries.

To go back to the time of the Romanovs, the earliest Tsars of that dynasty may be counted as revolutionaries in their resistance to the spirit of barbarism within their realm and the efforts they made to force a European civilization upon the people. Rebels, too, were those nobles of a later generation who aimed at a purely Russian culture, native to the soil, and fought against the Tsar's efforts to force an exotic type of civilization on a country that was essentially barbaric. From this protest against the Westernizing process sprang those early essays in Russian composition which were the foundation of all that important mass of literature that was to follow later. After winning recognition for their own language it was but a step to the application of the literary forms imported from abroad to new themes of national interest,

the product of the revolt against the iniquitous social conditions and the relics of Asiatic barbarism which the best intellects of the country no longer found tolerable. In a few years there appeared a whole crowd of talented authors who drew up a terrible indictment of the political, social, and cultural abuses of the age. Just then the revolutionary spirit spread to the stage, and it became possible for the first time to speak of an independent development of the Russian theatre.

Later, when the time arrived for the awakening of the *bourgeoisie*, the fiery utterances of the younger school of Russian writers were seen to be quite irreconcilable with the imported Western forms that still obtained—the vehicle of a frigid classicism and a dreary romanticism, divorced from all reality. Accordingly there sprang up a new and daring generation of authors and critics, who set themselves against the æstheticism of the upper classes, and from this movement emerged that peculiarly Russian type of realism which was to impose itself upon the whole world by reason of its unique achievements in literature and the art of the theatre.

One of the results of this last and greatest upheaval in the history of Russian culture has been the most tremendous revolution, both in politics and art, that the world has ever seen. Starting with a revolt against the *bourgeois* State, it has attempted, and in a measure achieved, the total extermination of all things hitherto accepted as the foundations of every kind of art; its object has been to build, on the ruins of a shattered civilization, a new world constructed on entirely different principles, and governed by entirely different laws.

Only by realizing the peculiar source from which all forms of Russian culture have originated is it possible to understand the history of the Moscow Theatre; like all things Russian, this was founded from the very beginning on revolt, and only when it became a weapon in the hand of enthusiastic reformers did it assume an individual significance.

The organic connection which has always existed in Russia between the theatre and the general cultural conditions is also the explanation of the peculiar character of the Russian stage, and of the powerful influence it exerted. Ever since it made common cause with the malcontents to free itself from the slavish imitation of foreign models the Russian theatre has been a living symbol and a pregnant means of expression for the contemporary ideals of the nation as a whole; consequently its further development must be closely linked with that of the Revolution, and from this point of view it must be judged if it is ever to be fully understood by the rest of Europe.

The present work owes its existence primarily to Dr Joseph Gregor, the well-known expert and Keeper of the Theatrical Collection in the National Library in Vienna, whose special knowledge of the subject marked him out as the man best fitted to ensure the success of a book of this kind. In accordance with Dr Gregor's request I gladly undertook to preface his convincing account of the methods of the Russian theatre with a background dealing with the historical and sociological aspects of the matter.

I gladly take this opportunity of expressing my gratitude to Mme Gilyarovskaya-Lab-nova, the director of the Revolutionary Theatre Museum in Moscow, for so kindly allowing me access to the collections under her care, as well as for valuable assistance in many other ways. Lastly, I must thank the Amalthea Press, and its intelligent director, Dr Heinrich Studer, for the readiness with which they have met my wishes in all technical and artistic matters connected with the production of this book.

RENÉ FÜLÖP-MILLER



## Chapter I

### THE THEATRE OF THE TSARS

COMPARED with the record of theatrical enterprise in other parts of Europe, the Russian theatre is seen to be a comparatively recent growth. At a time when the drama in England and the Netherlands was in an advanced stage of development, and the beginnings of a national dramatic literature were already noticeable in Germany, Russia was still devoid of any signs worth mentioning of the art of the theatre. The diversions of the Court at that time were of a truly primitive nature; performing bears and apes, boxing-matches, the broad humours of the Court jester, these were the favourite amusements of those in authority—for anything like intellectual culture they showed but little inclination.

The first indications of dramatic art are to be found about the middle of the seventeenth century in the form of mystery plays, though these were not strictly of Russian origin, but derived from a Western source. Some Polish traders had met with shows of this kind in the course of their journeys to the Hanse towns, and had introduced them to their own country, whence they had reached Muscovy by way of Little Russia, and were known among the people by the name of "Polish Jests," on account of their origin. It was not long before the Ecclesiastical Academy at Kiev became the patron of this form of theatrical art, and in carnival-time the students would go from house to house, giving comic interludes at each.

The Tsar Alexei Mikhailovitch, the second of the Romanov dynasty, was the first to take notice of these sacred mysteries, and had them performed at his Court at Moscow. The first exhibition of this kind took place in 1671 on the occasion of the Tsar's wedding, when a comedy entitled *Baba-Yaga* was played before the assembled company; in consequence of its great success, the Tsar ordered his Chamberlain, the Boyar Matveiev, to establish a permanent theatre at Preobrashenskoje Selo. The Russian players, however, soon failed to satisfy the Tsar, who gave orders for the importation of actors from abroad. Thus early do we notice the tendency, so characteristic of the Romanovs, to endeavour to establish cultural relations with the West, and to force European manners and customs on the people of Russia; though what was later to develop into a definite political programme was at that time—the second half of the seventeenth century—no more than a vague feeling of dissatisfaction with the type of amusement hitherto in vogue at the Russian Court. Such barbarous diversions as hunting, bear-baiting, boxing, and the fooleries of the Court jester might have been good enough for his predecessors, but Alexei Mikhailovitch felt the need of some more cultivated form of entertainment. All this is strictly in accord with a universal law of cultural development which demands that



the urge toward refinement should manifest itself first in the raising of the public taste in the matter of its amusements; one might almost say that the civilization of Russia began with the introduction of European methods into the entertainments of the Court.

At the Tsar's command, then, Matveiev invited a company of strolling players from Germany to visit Moscow, where, under the direction of a certain Jagan, they frequently performed before the Tsar, his family, and the Imperial household.

It was just at this time that the history of the German travelling theatre entered upon a new phase. Not long before the first German dramatist had appeared, in the person of Andreas Gryphius, who followed the example of both English and Dutch in breaking completely with the traditions of the *Meistersinger*. Nevertheless the fight between the rude popular comedy of the older style and the new dramatic forms of the Second Silesian School — the *Haupt- und Staatsaktionen* (classical tragedies) and the allegorical festival plays—still went on; no Gottsched<sup>1</sup> had yet come on the scene to burn the effigy of Hanswurst in public. The entertainment provided by Jagan and his company was naturally far from representing the modern style of drama which had already won such success in France; nevertheless the Tsar was so pleased with their efforts that he gave orders that for the future they should perform at Court on all holidays throughout the year.

In 1671 Jagan's company produced their first play with musical accompaniment, the orchestra consisting of wind and percussion instruments only. This piece was so greatly admired that it was repeated a few days after by the Tsar's command. There were some scruples at first, it is true, in connection with these early performances, for the Tsar feared a conflict with the Church; when, however, the Court chaplain had expressed his approval, Jagan ventured to give similar plays at Preobrashenskoje—*How Judith cut off the Head of Holofernes* was the title of one of them!—and henceforth we find the older mysteries rapidly giving place to pieces of the German type, which enjoyed an ever-increasing popularity. It was not long before Matveiev got permission to build a regular theatre of wood; it was semicircular, and the stage consisted of a high raised platform covered with red cloth and adorned with fir-trees. As the custom of the time forbade the Tsar to mingle with the people, unless on very exceptional occasions, a covered gallery was added for his accommodation, the interior of which was invisible from any other part of the auditorium.

It may be noted as an interesting coincidence that the establishment of this first Russian Court Theatre was really contemporary with the foundation of the *Comédie Française*, under Louis XIV, in 1673. The two theatres, it is true, belong to two entirely different stages of theatrical development; the Moscow public could still find pleasure in the pompous *Haupt- und Staatsaktionen* or in the rough buffoonery of the harlequinade, while Paris audiences had for some time been accustomed to *Tartuffe*, *Le Malade Imaginaire*, and many other plays of Molière.

<sup>1</sup> Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700–66), the father of German classical criticism. Hanswurst (literally "Jack Pudding") was the clown of the primitive farcical drama which this school of criticism condemned.

After the death of Alexei Mikhailovitch, this, the first of the Russian Court theatres, ceased to exist, and was not revived until late in the reign of his successor, Feodor Alexeievitch. Although this Tsar took but a slight personal interest in theatrical matters, his sister, Sofia Alexeievna, was an enthusiastic patroness of the stage. She gave performances in her own apartments in the Kremlin at which the younger members of the nobility, as well as the female servants, assisted as spectators; she even wrote a drama in verse, entitled *Catherine the Martyr*, besides translating a large number of German and French works, including *Le Médecin malgré lui*. The production of this comedy made an enormous impression, as it gave the Russian Court its first opportunity of becoming acquainted with the highly developed dramatic literature of France.

After the accession of Peter the Great the Westernizing tendency, which had so far been merely the expression of a scarcely conscious desire for a higher standard of existence, became a definite political principle. Peter had ascended the throne at a moment when Russia was called upon to decide whether she should still adhere to the manners and customs of Asia, or enter on the path of European civilization; the Tsar chose the latter alternative, and proceeded to carry out his reforms with an iron hand.

Peter was the first Russian sovereign who had actually lived in Western Europe, and so was able to see clearly the superiority of Western culture over the barbaric conditions that obtained in his own country. Accordingly he set himself the gigantic task of forcing an absolutely alien civilization on his people, and thereby bridging over the intellectual gulf which separated Russia from the rest of Europe. He even compelled the nobles to shave off their beards and adopt European costume, and would gladly have used his despotic power to root out every custom peculiar to the country.

Realizing that the theatre might be made an effective instrument for the purpose he had in view, the Tsar despatched his agent, Splavsky, to Danzig in the year 1702 with orders to bring back a theatrical company to Russia. Splavsky succeeded in raising a troupe of nine German actors selected from various travelling companies, under the direction of a certain Johann Kunst, who was not only a good actor, but had also written a number of dramas and comedies which became very popular in Moscow. The Tsar had a theatre specially built for the company in the Red Square, and gave orders that all who attended the performances should be exempt from the toll which was ordinarily exacted from any citizen leaving the old town after a certain hour. Furthermore, Kunst was entrusted with the task of selecting twelve young Russians from high official circles and training them in the actor's art, for which he was to receive extra pay.

At the same time Peter commanded that the pupils of the Sukarev School for the children of the nobility should be taught to act and to give regular performances, while the students of the ecclesiastical seminaries were to employ their spare time in the study of "moral comedies," which they were ultimately to perform in public. In the suburbs troupes of mountebanks now

began to make their appearance, with all sorts of crude drolleries; even the servants at the palace began to get up plays among themselves with the Tsar's direct encouragement.

Kunst, the German manager, who was now giving regular performances twice a week, chose the 1st of April, 1704, to play a practical joke which lost him his place. For that date he announced the performance of "an entirely new and original piece" which had had "great success abroad"; in consequence the theatre was packed, and the Tsar was present in person. When the curtain went up, nothing was to be seen but a large board with this inscription: "To-day is the First of April." Some of the audience laughed, while others were indignant, but the Tsar was so obviously annoyed that Kunst thought it best to fly the country. However, he left behind him a small nucleus of Russian actors who continued the performances under another German manager, Otto Fürst by name (1705). Fürst's *répertoire* consisted of thirteen plays, none of which had any special literary value; some ran to as many as twelve acts, and took three evenings to perform; the intervals between the acts were filled by comic interludes, with horse-play, dancing, and wrestling matches, ending occasionally in a free fight.

After the Russian victory over Charles XII of Sweden at Poltava the Tsar and his Court moved to the new palace at St Petersburg, to which city the Court Theatre was soon afterward transferred. To celebrate the victory Peter ordered a special piece to be written and performed. Worthless as a work of art, it is nevertheless of interest as being the first modern example of the dramatic treatment of a contemporary event. Not long after this the St Petersburg Theatre was completed; it was one of the first buildings to be erected, and began to give regular performances in 1724.

The death of Peter the Great was followed by a long series of struggles for the sovereignty; not till the accession of Anne, Duchess of Courland, do we find a fresh theatrical revival, the work this time not of German, but, significantly enough, of Italian influences. In Italy the art of the theatre had lately made enormous progress; the reformer Carlo Goldoni had appeared upon the scene to organize the already highly developed material of the *commedia dell' arte*, while at the same time opera and ballet had advanced by leaps and bounds, with the result that the Russian public found the Italian players infinitely more attractive than their German predecessors. The Italian company sent to St Petersburg by Augustus II of Saxony for the coronation festivities of the Empress Anna Ivanovna had the greatest possible success, and theatrical entertainments, which had almost disappeared in the reign of Catherine I, the one-time *vivandière*, and that lover of the chase, Peter II, became once more the fashionable amusement of the Court.

In 1735 the Empress Anna sent an invitation to an Italian company under the direction of the composer and conductor, Francesco Araja, a Neapolitan by birth, whose first opera, *Berenice*, had attracted attention in Florence a few years before; his arrival marks the first introduction of opera and ballet into Russia. It is interesting to note that the *prima ballerina* was the mother of the famous adventurer Casanova, while another member of the company was the

painter Girolamo Bono, whose scenic designs, remarkable for the boldness of their perspective, were on a scale of magnificence hitherto unknown to the Russians.

The *début* of these Italians in St Petersburg aroused a widespread enthusiasm for music, and Araja and his operas enjoyed a resounding triumph. A school of ballet was at once established at the Russian Court, and Duke Biron, the all-powerful favourite of the Empress, engaged an Italian dancing-master, and selected twelve girls and twelve boys in the Imperial service, to be trained as ballet-dancers. Next followed the formation of the first Russian chorus, who at once excited the admiration even of visitors from other countries by the beauty of their voices. The Empress was fond of organizing *bals masqués* on the grand scale; in the cold winter of 1740 she had a *palais de danse* built of solid ice, the scene of many elaborate entertainments, including those on the occasion of the marriage of the Court jester, Kulkovsky.

Unable to compete with the great success of the Italians, the visits of German companies passed almost unnoticed; even the great actress Caroline Neuber, so famous in her native land, was a complete failure in St Petersburg, when she appeared there with her own company in 1740. "Die Neuberin," as she was called, was regarded by her countrymen as one of the most 'advanced' actresses of the day, but compared with the Italian players the German company was immeasurably inferior.

On the death of the Empress Anna Ivanovna in 1740, the crown passed for a short time to the Princess Anna of Brunswick, who engaged a French company under the management of Serigny; before they could reach St Petersburg the new Empress was deposed, but her successor, Elizabeth, the illegitimate daughter of Peter the Great, took Serigny and his company into her service. For the coronation festivities a large theatre was erected at Moscow, capable of holding five thousand persons; an Italian opera was produced, with a prologue specially written for the occasion, and so great was the public interest that the crowd began to assemble on the day before the performance. Thanks to Elizabeth's keen interest in the theatre, no less than three companies were employed simultaneously by the Court at this time—Serigny's Frenchmen, a German troupe headed by the distinguished comedian Ackermann (Lessing's collaborator), and an excellent Italian company. The Empress's preference was for the French players; she placed the Court Theatre in the Winter Palace at their disposal, and issued a proclamation that every decently clad citizen should be admitted free to these performances. It was in her reign that a stone theatre, the first of its kind, was built in St Petersburg for Serigny and his players.

The stage in Russia was now entirely dominated by foreign influences—the old mystery plays had faded from memory; but about the middle of the eighteenth century a few authors began to write both tragedies and comedies in the Russian language, though they were little more than academic imitations of French and other models. Among the early Russian dramatists we must mention the great scholar Lomonossov, who, in addition to a number of important scientific works, wrote a few comedies and tragedies in verse. The second important name

of the period is Alexander Petrovitch Sumarokov, whose tragedy *Chorn*, written in alexandrines, had its first performance in 1750.

The great success of this piece induced the writer, who was still a pupil of the cadet school, to devote himself to literature. He turned out a dozen or more tragedies, comedies, and opera *libretti* in quick succession, but these were not able to obtain any permanent footing, being obviously imitated from the works of Racine, Corneille, and Voltaire. When the first enthusiasm had subsided, the Court returned to its old preference for the French originals, and Sumarokov's plays, like those of Lomonossov, disappeared from the *répertoire*.

It was in Elizabeth's reign that the first provincial theatre was established. This was the work of Feodor Volkov, the son of a rich leather manufacturer at Yaroslav, who, as a young man, had paid a visit to St Petersburg, where he had been captivated by the Italian actors, and on his return home had given amateur performances in a shed attached to his father's factory. These had aroused such general enthusiasm in Yaroslav that the nobles and leading merchants of the town commissioned young Volkov to build a permanent public theatre, and collected a considerable sum of money for that purpose. This, the first provincial theatre in Russia, was built on the banks of the Volga, and formally opened in 1755. Volkov was his own architect, mechanic, conductor, and stage-manager; all the pieces that were performed at his theatre—even the Italian—he translated himself; he recruited his company of players, as well as his orchestra, from his servants, his friends, and members of the church choirs.

The fame of this undertaking soon reached St Petersburg, and Elizabeth had Volkov, with his entire establishment, brought to that city at the cost of the Government; so delighted was she with their performances that she presented Volkov with a valuable ring, arranged for his brother's admission to the cadet corps, and kept the whole troupe of players in St Petersburg. From 1756 Volkov continued to perform in the capital, first in a private residence, later in a theatre specially built for him. In 1757 the Empress sent him and his colleague Schumsky to Moscow to establish a Russian theatre in that city, and from that time performances in Russian were given regularly in both capitals.

In 1759 the first opera with Russian text was produced at the Hermitage Theatre in St Petersburg; it was called *Alceste*; the book was by Sumarokov, the music by a composer named Raupp; in the same year Araj's three-act opera, *Alexander in India*, was performed with enthusiastic applause.

As may be gathered from the titles of these two works, the new *baroque* type of opera, with its preference for pathetic subjects from the antique, had found its way to Russia; relations between the Empire and Western Europe had been growing gradually closer, so that the latest successes of Paris and Milan were now sure of a hearing in St Petersburg after no long interval. Moreover, Gluck had just arrived upon the scene with those reforms which were to lead to the crowning achievements of the *baroque* style.

After the death of Elizabeth and the short reign of her successor, the mad Peter III, the

accession of Catherine II brought with it a further advance in the development of the theatre in Russia. The new Empress was a passionate lover of the stage, and had translated a number of foreign plays, besides writing some original pieces which were produced at the Hermitage. On coming to the throne she lost no time in rewarding Volkov in the most liberal manner, giving him an estate in the country, and raising him to the rank of a noble. Her next step was to found a theatre in St Petersburg for the people, the actors being chosen from the humbler classes, clerks, book-binders, and composers, who gave their performances in a primitive wooden amphitheatre in the open air.

It was in Catherine's reign, too, that the first permanent dramatic school was started in St Petersburg, in 1779, with the object of attracting a regular succession of actors drawn from the Russian people. In this institution, which was conducted on the strictest boarding-school principles, clever children from all classes were received as pupils; if after a few years of instruction they showed sufficient talent employment was found for them in the various theatres. It is especially interesting to note that the first Russian school of acting was almost of the nature of an 'enclosed order'; the grave, monastic atmosphere which surrounded the education of these young students of the drama has to a certain extent survived up to our own time, and is still distinctly perceptible in the 'studios' of to-day.

The death of Catherine in 1796 and the accession of her gifted but demented son Paul mark the end of a brilliant period in the history of Russia and the Russian theatre. The new Emperor was a crazy despot, who instantly crushed every sign of progress as soon as it appeared, and treated all his subjects, even the most highly placed, as his slaves, for whom he had nothing but a profound contempt. Consequently the assassination of Paul and the accession of Alexander I were hailed as a providential relief and the beginning of a new era.

The new Emperor was of a kindly disposition, with particularly pleasing and ingratiating manners, and was fond of impressing people with his 'liberal' tendencies. Trained by the Swiss Laharpe in the school of Rousseau's "Return to Nature," he presented a strong contrast to his predecessors, whose endeavour had been to turn the Court of St Petersburg into a second Versailles, with all its artificiality and affectation. His rather sentimental temperament, combined with his peculiar upbringing, inclined him to favour, to a certain extent, the romantic tendencies of the age; accordingly in the theatre the stiff formality of the *baroque* was superseded by the spirit of Romance. Henceforth the aim was to imitate nature; 'pathetic' tragedies and operas gave place to pastoral comedies, and the scenic artist did his best to bring gardens, forests, and cottages on to the stage. A description of this new style of natural scenery has come down to us from the year 1815, with reference to the work of the painter Gonsavo, who was employed at the Court Theatre in St Petersburg; the contemporary critics enthusiastically praise the way in which the artist has contrived to represent a village with its church, tavern, cottages, gardens, and hedges, true to nature in every detail.

It was under the rule of Alexander I that Russia was first recognized as one of the Great

Powers in European politics—indeed, for some time after the fall of Napoleon she actually took precedence of all the rest. It was doubtless due to the famous festivities at the Congress of Vienna, at which Alexander, with his Ministers and Court officials, was present, that the lighter kinds of theatrical entertainments now began to penetrate into Russia, especially in the form of opera and operetta. More theatres, too, were built about this time; the Moscow Grand Theatre was opened in 1824, the Little Theatre in 1825; lastly, after the Tsar's death in 1831, the Alexander Theatre in St Petersburg. In the opening decades of the nineteenth century almost all the classic plays of Europe, the great French tragedies, the dramas of Shakespeare and Schiller, found their way on to the Russian stage. In 1824, only three years after its original production in Berlin, Weber's *Der Freischütz* was given in St Petersburg, both in German and Russian versions, and was received with tumultuous applause.

In 1825 Alexander died and was succeeded by Nicholas I, the latter part of whose reign was a time of stern and gloomy repression, and of hostility to any intellectual or political activity which might be regarded as suspicious. Throughout this period the Court Theatres were barred to all new influences, and confined themselves to preserving, so far as was possible, the purity of their own traditions. From the beginning of the forties the Imperial Theatres maintained a wholly conservative attitude; henceforth all new impulses were to come first from the nobles, and later from the awakening *bourgeoisie*.

## *Chapter II*

### THE THEATRE OF THE NOBLES

TOWARD the end of the seventeen-hundreds the activities connected with the patronage of the arts, which had originated with the Tsars, came ever more and more under the influence of the aristocracy, until about the beginning of the new century the nobles had become to a great extent the leaders of the movement.

Up to that date the position of this class in Russia had been in the highest degree anomalous, and radically different from that of the nobility of Western Europe. As late as the middle of the eighteenth century the Russian nobles sent on diplomatic or ambassadorial service to other European countries, where they were received on terms of equality by their colleagues, found themselves on their return once more at the mercy of a despotic master; the highest dignitaries might be flogged and tortured at the Tsar's good pleasure; even Peter the Great was in the habit of punishing any noble who had incurred his anger by making him Court jester, and thereby exposing him to every sort of indignity. It was not till 1762 that the nobles, taking advantage of the dynastic struggles of the time, managed to secure an Imperial Privilege exempting them from corporal chastisement and from compulsory public service. From this date we may note some relaxation of the Tsar's despotic rule; the aristocracy had exchanged a state of complete slavery for one of comparative freedom, however limited.

This alteration in their social position enabled the nobility to interest themselves more extensively in intellectual matters, with the result that a certain æsthetic culture presently began to flourish among them, especially in St Petersburg, though the forms it assumed were frankly imitative or imported from abroad. It was now that Italian architects, chief of whom was the gifted Rastrelli, began to build the gorgeous palaces in the capital which formed so splendid a setting for the social display of the noble families. Yet in spite of these artistic activities, it must be confessed that 'art' at this period meant little more to them than an increase of refinement in the methods of entertainment, amusement, and the display of wealth. But it was not long before the nobles of the Court made the theatre, and especially the Italian opera, their peculiar care; a group of ten Moscow aristocrats clubbed together to pay for the visit of an Italian opera company, and so founded the first regular private opera in Russia.

By far the most important achievement of the ruling classes, from a cultural point of view, was the establishment of the Serf Theatre. After the nobles had won exemption from public service and consequently from compulsory residence in the capital many of them retired to their country estates and began to form companies of actors from the enslaved peasants, who



were to afford entertainment to their masters and their guests at seasons such as Lent, when the theatres of the capital were closed. These companies, as well as the orchestras, were composed exclusively of serfs; the result was a unique form of theatrical organization, such as, in its social aspect, is to be found nowhere else in the history of the theatre, and which was to have a powerful influence on the subsequent development of the Russian stage.

One of the best-known theatres of this kind belonged to Prince M. Yussupov, a wealthy nobleman who, at the end of the eighteenth century, had been director of the Imperial Theatres, and, after retiring into private life, formed a troupe of players from the serfs attached to his castle of Archangelskoje; the nucleus of this body was a *corps de ballet* consisting of thirty young girls chosen from the domestics in the castle. The Prince engaged a whole staff of music-teachers and dancing-masters, and turned one of the farm-buildings into a dancing-school in which all the girls were kept in strict seclusion, to be trained as dancers and singers.

From time to time Yussupov brought the entire company to Moscow, and took them to the theatre so that these simple peasants might become familiar with the technique of the stage and form themselves on the best models. In summer ballets, operas, and comedies were given in the open air, as well as the national dances of the various Russian races. In winter the company performed in a theatre, specially built for them in the castle, before an audience of visitors from the neighbouring estates or from Moscow. The repertory consisted mostly of ballets and one-act pieces; operas and comedies were only occasionally attempted.

Yussupov's company soon attracted general attention among people of his own rank, and were offered engagements in various directions; some performances were given at the nobles' club in Moscow, and on these occasions the Prince received considerable sums for their services.

On Yussupov's death the company was dissolved, owing to a provision in his will by which all the adult singers and dancers of his school were to receive their freedom after his death. Most of them sought a wider field for their talents in the provinces, where they were engaged by various noble houses to organize fresh theatrical companies from the serfs on the different estates. Thus one of Yussupov's company, the dancer Rabudovskaia, settled in Charkov, where she trained a *corps de ballet* which gave regular performances in that town and the neighbourhood.

Special mention must be made of the troupe maintained by Prince Mestchersky, which did much toward advancing the interests of the theatre; nor must we forget Count Skavronsky, whose enthusiasm for the stage amounted to a mania—his servants were required always to use the declamatory tone, even among themselves, and when the valet had to address his master he was obliged to do so not in the speaking but the singing voice. Apart from these exceptional cases, there is no doubt that the institution of the Serf Theatre had a certain cultural influence on the people, for the peasant lads and maidens who were enrolled in the various companies had to learn to read and write, besides acquiring some knowledge of French and Italian; at a later date we find the choristers of the Yussupov company actually taking part in

a performance of Italian opera in Moscow. As time went on a considerable amount of talent was brought to light and duly encouraged; at the beginning of the nineteenth century the entire company from Count Stolypin's estate was incorporated with the *personnel* of the Imperial Theatres. Thus men whose lives would otherwise have been spent in the stable or behind the plough were now enabled to fit themselves for a stage career. The distinguished actor Michael Tchepkin was the son of a serf who had been valet to Count Volkenstein, and owed his subsequent success to the encouragement given him when a member of his master's company. In 1828 his admirers collected a large sum of money for the purchase of his freedom, and thus enabled him to secure an engagement at the Imperial Theatre in Moscow.

Then we have the singer Parascha Gorbunova, originally a serf belonging to Count Sheremetiev, who, attracted by the beauty of her voice, fell in love with, and eventually married her. Many of the orchestral players, too, rose to positions of importance, *e.g.*, the operatic composer Matinsky, a serf of Count Yagushinsky. He accompanied his master to Italy, where he received a musical education, and wrote several operas, two of which, *Gostini Dvor* and *The Pasha of Tunis*, met with great success in Moscow and St Petersburg. Other serfs won fame as violinists or leaders of orchestras, *e.g.*, Fomin, one of the first Russians to conduct in a theatre.

The rise of the Serf Theatre thus first enabled persons of the lowest class to 'tread the boards,' and henceforward the supply of talented artists from the ranks of the Russian peasantry was never to run dry. But though the Serf Theatre brought much fine talent to light, and, what is no less important, roused the country people for the first time to take an interest in the stage, the effect of all these cultural experiments was strictly limited. The aristocrats, for all their love of art, were too closely confined to their own narrow circle for their efforts to produce any really deep impression upon the people at large. Nor must we forget the one degrading and humiliating factor which, as an essential part of the whole system of serfdom, was never absent: the condition of the artists, their good or bad treatment, their rise or fall, was absolutely dependent in the last resort on the arbitrary caprice of their masters, who could use them kindly or expose them to the deepest humiliation according to the whim of the moment. In many country houses, it is true, the female players were looked upon as members of the family, and in a few cases were raised by marriage to a position of actual equality. Prince Yussupov, in particular, took every care for the well-being of his dancing-girls, gave them expensive presents, called in the best physicians when they were ill, and provided them with dowries when they came to marry; he even went so far, in winter, as to have snow-hills made for them in the courtyard, so that they might amuse themselves with tobogganning in miniature sleighs.

But there were other owners who treated their serf-actors with great brutality, and it frequently happened that a player who had just delighted an audience by his performance was soundly thrashed immediately afterward by his master's orders; Prince Yasensky is known to have served one of his most talented *ballerinas* in this way with disastrous effect upon her health. One talented serf-composer took refuge in suicide rather than submit to the humiliations and

cruelties inflicted by his master. In connection with the *corps de ballet*, too, there were naturally frequent openings for breaches of morality; many of the owners had indecent spectacles performed, and even the otherwise humane Prince Yussupov insisted now and then on his ballet-girls undressing in sight of the public. The treatment of course varied, but in every case both actors and actresses were dependent, for good or ill, on the caprice of their owner.

This sense of absolute ownership was so deeply rooted that even the State Theatres when, later, they began to employ specially gifted actors, chosen from the private companies of the nobles, treated them as no better than slaves. Properly speaking, all members of the Imperial Theatres ranked as free men, but actually the directors treated the most celebrated artists recruited from the Serf Theatre exactly as their former owners had done—they were their property, to be disposed of as they chose, to be beaten and locked up, should they be so unlucky as to incur the displeasure of those who were set over them.

It is clear from all this that the cultural value of the Serf Theatre, as also of the kind of art encouraged by the Russian aristocracy, was still extremely limited. In their patronage of the theatre the nobles aimed at nothing more than procuring for themselves a new æsthetic pleasure, a purely sensuous enjoyment; what the people of that time, almost without exception, failed to grasp was the fact that art is something that must satisfy the need for a higher humanity and a loftier ideal of moral freedom.

The influence of the aristocracy, moreover, in matters of art was limited to a very small circle—it had no vital connection with the nation as a whole. Neither the stage nor the literature of the time could be described as specifically Russian—in all their activities we see nothing more than an imitation of Western models—and this fact alone is sufficient to give a certain air of artificiality and unreality to all that passed for culture in Russian society. With so little care on the part of the nobles for any true spiritual freedom and progress in their own artistic life, little attempt was made to invite the lower classes to share in their cultural achievements. Just as the priceless collections and libraries accumulated by the princely houses were accessible only to their owners and their guests, and the lovely gardens with their antique statues were merely places for the members of the ruling class to walk in, so were their theatrical entertainments given solely for the benefit of the same exclusive circle. These *côteries* of the Russian nobility stand out as typical examples of what happens when a quite small section of a nation lives only for itself, entirely out of touch with the real people, and actually at the cost of the enslaved masses.

Perhaps the most striking proof of the intellectual sterility of the period is the fact that all the time that the aristocracy were in power, in spite of their encouragement of art, there was an almost complete lack of a national literary output, which is the most important preparation for a national theatre. The life of the Court, as well as that of the nobility, was based wholly on ideas of a civilization imported from Europe, and anyone who desired to pass for a person of culture spoke no other language than French or German. The few who tried to write in

Russian confined themselves, both in form and matter, to the mere slavish imitation of European models, while the mass of educated people regarded Russian literature with a contempt like that which Frederick the Great felt for the literature of his own country. Even so late as the second decade of the nineteenth century we find Griboledov remarking on the preference given to foreign works in the original rather than in a Russian translation—to read a French book one would sit up half the night, but with a Russian one what could one do but fall asleep in one's chair!

It was not till the beginning of the nineteenth century that the change took place which cleared the way in Russia for the growth of a truly national literature. The heroic struggle of 1812, ending in the victory over Napoleon, the dreaded dictator of Europe, aroused unanimous enthusiasm throughout the whole of Russia, and caused such a wave of patriotism as had never been known before; even the nobility of Russia began at last to pay some sort of attention to the manners and customs of their own people. It was the war of freedom against Napoleon that was the direct inspiration of the best writers of the new Russian school. In the eighteen-twenties the hitherto despised Russian literature suddenly became a factor of considerable social importance—it was no longer regarded as a disgrace to use the Russian language for the expression of poetic feeling. When Pushkin appeared on the scene he was at once received with such enthusiastic applause as had never before been bestowed on any Russian author.

Meanwhile an important revolution had taken place in the ruling classes, where the intellectual leadership had passed from Court circles to the ranks of the lesser nobility. The lower stratum of the aristocracy was much more closely in sympathy with the people, since it had itself suffered grievously from the oppression of the Tsar and the higher bureaucratic circles, and consequently was always ready to identify itself with any revolt against the existing state of things. A large number of the lesser nobles regarded the system of slavery introduced by the Tsars as something degrading and shameful—it affected all classes and, in the case of the peasantry, had developed into the most frightful kind of oppression. There grew up a distinct order of 'remorseful nobles,' who looked upon their own privileged status as a disgrace, and felt themselves largely responsible for the wrongs inflicted on the serfs.

From the moment that Russian literature came under the influence of the lesser nobility it immediately began to assume a quite unexpected importance. Russian writers had been little more than clever imitators of foreign models; now there seemed to spring up all at once an absolutely original literature, which, though still showing traces of foreign influence, had an entirely new message to deliver. All these new writers whose works were to be regarded later as the classics of Russian literature, joined in the protest against the existing order of society and the worthlessness and corruption of the ruling classes; we may consider the moment when that protest first found utterance on the Russian stage as the beginning of that particularly vital and valuable product, the real Russian theatre.

Pushkin had chosen the form of the old rhymed romances for his criticism of the life of the Russian aristocracy; Lermontov had employed the epic for a similar purpose; it remained for Alexander Sergeïevitch Griboïedov to choose the stage for his fiery protest against the prevailing order of things. His comedy *Gore ot uma* (*To Know is to Suffer*) is a terrible indictment of the Government and society in general; in light and elegant verse he shows how a young Russian who, during his sojourn abroad, had grown into a sensible, cultured, and energetic man returns home only to come to utter ruin when brought into contact with the conditions and the people of his native land. With withering scorn Griboïedov depicts the various types of aristocratic and official society in the Russia of his day—the moral corruption of the highest dignitaries, the boastful incapacity of the officers, the philistinism of the aristocracy, the stupidity of the politicians.

This piece came like a revelation to the revolutionary leaders of the lesser nobility, as well as to the *bourgeoisie*. Although it was long before it could get a hearing on the stage, thousands of copies were at once put into private circulation, and during carnival-time selections from it were played by masked students, wandering from street to street. Similar in effect upon the public was Gogol's comedy *The Government Inspector*, the second masterpiece of Russian satire dealing with contemporary conditions, which, strange to say, in spite of its inflammatory nature, was actually produced in 1836 at the Court Theatre in St Petersburg in the presence of the Emperor Nicholas I. In Gogol's comedy we find scorn and anger pushed to the extreme limits; the corruption and incompetence of the official hierarchy are exposed to pitiless mockery; from beginning to end there is not a decent, sympathetic, or estimable character.

These two comedies, especially Gogol's, mark the rise of the realistic school of drama, which set itself in deliberate opposition to the classic-romantic ideals. The further developments of these methods, which were to win such world-wide recognition for the Russian theatre, were totally divorced from the sort of art that had found favour with the Court and the aristocracy; they sprang rather from the revolt of a class-conscious and patriotic *bourgeoisie* against the fossilized idea of a vanishing feudalism.

## Chapter III

### THE THEATRE OF THE BOURGEOISIE

NICHOLAS I died in 1855, and was succeeded by Alexander II, a humane ruler and a true friend to reform. As if relieved of a heavy burden, Russia seemed to breathe again, and a wave of democratic feeling passed over the country; all those forces which had long been at work to bring about a new social order were able at last, after thirty years of the severest repression, to assert themselves freely and in full daylight; little by little the life of the people was delivered once more from the long torpor—that “churchyard calm”—in which it had been imprisoned.

The most marked characteristic of the new era was a mighty forward movement, intellectual and political, of the *bourgeoisie*, while the nobility were gradually relegated to the position of mere figureheads. The triumphant *bourgeois* were divided into two groups, the ‘Intellectuals’ on the one hand, and, on the other, the wealthy captains of industry and commerce. By the term ‘Intellectuals’ are to be understood all those who for many years past had become dissatisfied with the limited interests of their circle or who had got out of touch with their own social stratum. As early as the eighteenth century we find certain forerunners of this movement, men who showed all the signs characteristic of the later *intelligentsia*; they were opposed to absolute monarchy and enthusiastic for the democratization of Russia; they stood for the freedom of an oppressed people, and favoured every kind of revolutionary idea. All through the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth, influences were at work which were to knit this heterogeneous and constantly shifting group into a corporate whole. The ‘Intellectuals’ included scholars, clerics, journalists, officials, peasants, players, and the ‘remorseful’ noblemen in their ranks; but the strongest element, both in numbers and in influence, was the youthful *bourgeoisie* which had become familiarized at the universities with the achievements of Western culture, and was now passionately eager for reform in all directions.

For material support the ‘Intellectuals’ turned to the wealthy burghers of the period, the manufacturers and big business men. In Russia the real *bourgeoisie* had always been strongly in favour of reform, owing to the fact that they themselves were largely descended from the enslaved peasantry; consequently we always find a number of these wealthy citizens heartily in sympathy with the poorer classes, and well disposed to every movement having for its object the improvement of their social condition. They felt, moreover, that they themselves were despised by the supercilious aristocrats, whom they considered to be unfairly privileged.

It was not long before the rise of the *bourgeois* element in Russian society made itself felt in

the theatre, thanks chiefly to the dramatist A. N. Ostrovsky, who may be described as the originator of Russian *bourgeois* comedy; he it was who completed that important change from the aristocratic-romantic drama of the thirties to the realistic play of *bourgeois* society, which Gogol had already begun, but which was now to find its classic expression in Ostrovsky. While Gogol, Griboïedov, and their contemporaries had confined themselves to a bitter exposure of the nobles and the bureaucrats, Ostrovsky went further, and showed up this unproductive section of society in direct contrast to the *bourgeoisie*, whose character and conduct he paints sympathetically, though not without some shrewd criticism. His comedies were the first to deal, on a large scale, with the mentality of a class which no Russian dramatist as yet had thought it worth while to describe with such particularity. His method was to exclude any touch of romance or pathos, his sole concern being to represent men and matters as they actually are; his plays mark the beginning of realism on the Russian stage—that realism to which it was to owe its most important successes in the future.

Here again it is to be noted that the theatre was merely the expression of the general spirit of the time. The relaxation of a hitherto absolute censorship had been followed by surprising developments, particularly in the world of newspapers and the publication of political pamphlets. Art came to be regarded more and more as an instrument of social service—the æsthetic, the romantic, strain was condemned as ridiculous or even pernicious; the barriers between pure literature and political propaganda were completely broken down; “writing for writing’s sake” gave place for a time to the *Anklage-Literatur* (“literature of denunciation”), the sole object of which was to improve the actual condition of affairs and to lend support to the political efforts of the nation.

The actual pioneer of this movement had appeared some time in the forties, in the person of the critic Belinsky, whose writings were soon to exercise the strongest possible influence on the literature of the period. Turgenev, his lifelong friend, has given an admirable description of this remarkable man. Belinsky, he tells us, was a passionate but at the same time essentially sincere character—“art, in his view, did not exist for art’s sake, any more than life could be said to exist merely for the sake of life. True, he allowed to art, just as to science or politics, the right to exist in its own sphere, only he demanded from it, as from any other human activity, truth before all things—truth was the paramount principle to which art, like science, must be made subservient.” Thanks to Belinsky, the theorist, and the various writers who came under his influence, we find in Russia, about the middle of the nineteenth century, the completion of a process which might have been observed some decades earlier in the literature of Western Europe—the triumph of the middle classes, and the consequent change from romance to realism; everything in the new style of writing reflected the rise of the *bourgeoisie* and the declining prestige of the nobles.

Ostrovsky’s comedy *Never sit in a Stranger’s Sleigh*, produced in 1853, had already gained a triumph for the new manner, but an even greater success was won five years later by *The*

*Storm*, the most famous of his works, which was played to crowded houses for ninety-six successive nights—an unheard-of number for those times. Equally successful were two other of his comedies, *A Good Birth* and *The Forest*; all four plays at once achieved the widest possible popularity, and brought about a complete revolution in public taste.

It was inevitable that this change of outlook should result in a thorough reformation of the world of the theatre. Ever since the thirties many of the most talented actors had endeavoured to escape from the conventional 'pathetic manner,' and to substitute a higher standard of truth and fidelity to nature; this, however, was only possible in theatres where the repertory contained pieces of a realistic character. The arrival of Ostrovsky, however, had paved the way for a real reform in dramatic methods, though it must be confessed that it had to fight some time longer against strong opposition from without.

At that time the most important house for the performance of comedy was the Little Theatre in Moscow, where a company of distinguished players were seen to the greatest advantage, amid the intimate surroundings of a building well adapted to their purpose; but as this theatre was under Court control, its tendencies were naturally rather conservative. Under the liberal-minded Alexander II this factor had been no great hindrance, but, after that Emperor's assassination, the reactionary policy of his son, Alexander III, had exercised a deadening influence on the artistic activities of the State Theatres in general, and particularly of the 'Little.' Side by side with the political reaction the Pan-Slavonic party, which was hostile to Western influences, came into even greater prominence, with the result that the Court censorship regarded the new movement in European literature with the gravest suspicion, just at the time when it had become the champion of realism.

On the other hand, the same 'Young Russia' that had so passionately resisted political oppression was up in arms against the sort of artistic control that the State Theatres now claimed to exercise; thus there sprang up in Russia during the last decades of the nineteenth century a whole crop of private theatres which now assumed the lead in all questions of art and held it almost unchallenged until the Revolution. These private enterprises, both intellectually and materially, were the creation of the newly awakened *bourgeoisie*, to whom the development of the Russian theatre owes a great debt. It is true these also came under the police censorship, but even so they were allowed greater freedom than the Imperial Theatres, and used it to bring about a radical reform in the artistic methods employed.

Meanwhile Western Europe, and Germany in particular, had been converted to the principle of naturalism, which, starting from the novels of Zola, quickly invaded the theatre, where it found expression in the famous, and much abused, "Meiningen system," so called from the company attached to the Court of Duke George II of Saxe-Meiningen, who at that time were attracting considerable attention all over Europe by the historical accuracy of their productions and the artistic harmony in which they all worked together.

The two visits of these players to Russia in the eighties made a deep impression on the



'Young Russia' group, whose hitherto vague dissatisfaction with the methods of the Little Theatre now took a definite direction. They saw clearly how far the settings and the productions of the Moscow house fell short of the achievements of Western Europe; compared with the Meiningen company, the performances at the 'Little,' and indeed all the other State Theatres, in spite of many fine individual achievements, seemed old-fashioned and out of date.

It so happened that just at this crisis a new Russian dramatist of great importance appeared in the person of Anton Tchekov. Tchekov's plays, however—delicate studies of certain phases of Russian society, in which mere outward theatrical effect must be subordinated to the creation of a subtle atmosphere—could not possibly be done justice to by the hackneyed methods of the classical tradition. With plays like *The Seagull*, *Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and *Uncle Vanya* individual talent, however distinguished, was not sufficient; what was wanted in order to bring out the delicate *nuances* of the production was an entirely new kind of *ensemble* acting hitherto unknown to the Russian stage. Consequently, in spite of all their pains, and although the author was a personal friend of several of the actors, the Little Theatre had no success with the plays of Tchekov; similarly, the experiment at the Alexander Theatre with *The Seagull* was a complete failure, and very nearly put a miserable end to the author's dramatic career.

As with Tchekov, so with Ibsen, the greatest master of the naturalistic school, whose works also demanded a stage technique which was essentially foreign to the Russian Court Theatres. It is true that the social, moral, and psychological problems with which Ibsen dealt made a strong appeal to a Russian audience, but the players were completely lacking in those particular methods which alone could make the author's meaning intelligible. The consequence was that the Court Theatres studiously avoided the plays of both authors—they were hardly ever performed, or, if played, were given in an altogether inadequate fashion, to the great disappointment and indignation of the new order of *bourgeois*, who regarded these authors as the greatest and truest interpreters of the spirit of the age.

The enthusiasm of the Russian public for the naturalistic school was based, to a great extent, on the fact that during the last decade of the nineteenth century the sympathies of the *bourgeoisie* had shifted more and more from a purely individualistic to a social-collectivist standpoint; individualism, they held, was consistent only with an aristocratic conception of society, whereas the aim of the *bourgeoisie* must be to subordinate the claims of the individual to those of the community in general. To the *bourgeois* mind, again, the conception of the 'pathetic-heroic' is radically alien and unsympathetic; therefore on the stage the idea of the 'hero' must be replaced by the creation of an atmosphere (*Milieu-Schilderung*), and excellency of *ensemble* be considered of more importance than the outstanding performance of the individual actor. Thus we see the mighty struggle between the *bourgeoisie* and the aristocracy reflected on the stage in the conflict between the desire for a new and naturalistic art of *ensemble* on the one side, and the individualist tradition of the Court Theatre on the other.

It was reserved for a wealthy member of the *bourgeoisie* to create the new Russian theatre and at the same time to evolve the first definitely Russian style of acting which was destined to furnish so stimulating an example for the whole world.

Constantin Sergeïevitch Alexeïev, better known by his stage-name of Stanislavsky, came from a well-to-do family of manufacturers, and was himself originally a factory-owner. Even as a young man he had been greatly interested in the theatre, a fact which may be accounted for partly by his ancestry, for his grandmother was a French actress who came to St Petersburg in 1847, where she was engaged as soubrette at the Mikhaïlovsky Theatre, and afterward married a Russian architect.

Stanislavsky began by producing plays for the amateur performances of the German Club in Moscow, where he met a large number of young people who, like himself, were enthusiastic theatre-goers, and many of whom afterward became members of his famous company. All these enthusiasts were inspired by an almost religious fervour for their art, which they regarded not as a mere form of amusement, but as the most serious of callings, to which they were prepared to consecrate their lives. Stanislavsky was not long in forming a little company of actors who gave regular performances in a room on the third floor of an apartment house, he himself playing character parts in plays of the Tchekov school. In these early productions he gave clear proof of his leanings toward naturalism, which were definitely confirmed by the first visit of the Meiningen company in 1885. He saw at once that here were the foundations on which a new Russian theatre might be built up, and in a performance at the Moscow Hunt Club he employed for the first time on the Russian stage a strictly naturalistic setting in the Meiningen manner. In another of his productions he showed his talent for infusing new life and intelligence into the supers who, in the Russian theatre, had hitherto been left entirely to their own devices, and at a performance of Gutzkov's *Uriel Acosta* the lifelike acting of the crowd in the synagogue scene aroused general admiration.

The second visit of the Meiningen company in 1890 confirmed Stanislavsky in his conviction that it was high time to make a thorough reform in the methods of the Russian theatre—far more attention must be paid to the production, the setting, and especially the harmonious co-operation of the individual actors. That his plans did not succeed at first was owing to the lack of a permanent company to put them into practice; as this could not be hoped for so long as he had to depend upon the casual support of amateurs, he determined to build a theatre of his own.

But it was not till 1897 that Stanislavsky met the man whose wide experience of stage technique enabled the reformer fully to realize his ideas; this was the distinguished author Nemirovitch-Danchenko, the dramatic adviser to the Little Theatre, who had for some time been thinking on the same lines as himself. An enthusiastic admirer of Tchekov, Nemirovitch-Danchenko had made several vain attempts to induce the Little Theatre to appreciate the author at his proper value, while as professor at the Moscow Philharmonic he had trained a large

number of actors whom he had imbued with the spirit of the naturalistic movement. About this time he happened to hear of the doings of the young manager, and at once recognized that here was the man best fitted to be his collaborator. In May 1897 he wrote to Stanislavsky, suggesting a meeting for the purpose of discussing the establishment of a new theatre in Moscow; at the same time he addressed a lengthy communication to the directors of the Imperial Theatres on the advisability of reform in the Little Theatre, though he had but slight hope of success in that direction.

On the same day that Stanislavsky made an appointment by telegraph to meet him at the Slaviansky Bazaar restaurant Nemirovitch-Danchenko received a reply from the theatre directors refusing to consider his proposals; accordingly he set out for the meeting with a firm resolve to carry out his plan under any circumstances. In a small private room of the restaurant the two talked together till late in the night, and then moved on to Stanislavsky's villa, where they continued the conversation.

The result of this conference, which had lasted for seventeen hours, was the idea of the Moscow Art Theatre, which was destined to exercise so extraordinary an influence on theatrical art, not only in Moscow, but all over the world.

The two men decided to keep their plans to themselves for the time being—though a third person, Tchekov's wife, was let into the secret—but in the winter of 1897 it became common talk in Moscow that Stanislavsky and Nemirovitch-Danchenko were about to open a new theatre to be run on the principles of reform. Naturally they were confronted at the outset with every sort of difficulty; the Moscow municipal authorities flatly refused to consider their appeal for a subsidy, and it was only with great difficulty that the rich *bourgeois* were induced to patronize the undertaking. At last the directors of the Philharmonic Society, in which the wealthy merchants were largely interested, declared their willingness to furnish the necessary assistance, but as their contribution amounted to only twenty-eight thousand roubles, it was evident that all idea of building a new theatre must be given up for the present. Accordingly Stanislavsky entered into an agreement with the Hermitage Theatre for a certain number of performances with a company consisting chiefly of young actors, friends of Stanislavsky and pupils of Nemirovitch-Danchenko—nine-and-thirty members in all.

For their first production they chose A. Tolstoy's historical drama *Tsar Feodor Ivanovitch*, which had been banned by the censor thirty years before; this was to be followed by *Antigone* and *Hannele's Himmelfahrt*. Rehearsals were begun in a park at Tushkino, a residential neighbourhood near Moscow, in a sort of summer-house, where nothing but a curtain separated the stage from the auditorium. Most of the actors migrated to Tushkino, and Stanislavsky himself was not far away, so that the entire company could devote themselves to the task without fear of interruption. At the first rehearsal Stanislavsky began with a speech in which he summarized his plans and his artistic principles, after which all concerned settled down to many months of strenuous work on the lines indicated. When putting a play into rehearsal

Stanislavsky devised an entirely new method, which was subsequently adopted by other theatres in Russia; as his chief object was to secure a perfect *ensemble* through the united efforts of all concerned, he discarded the usual plan of coaching his actors separately, preferring to rely on the work done at the general rehearsals. When a new play was to be studied he would begin by calling his company together day after day merely for a general reading of the piece and a thorough discussion of every possible shade of meaning and the best means of expressing it, so that each member of the cast got to know exactly what was the idea of the actor to whom he was playing 'opposite.'

Not till every member of the company, thanks to these preparatory studies, had mastered the entire play in its minutest details did Stanislavsky pass on to the actual rehearsals; he would then take one scene at a time and work at it until it became a living thing exactly in accordance with the producer's intentions. This scrupulously careful method of rehearsal was characteristic of the Moscow Art Theatre from the beginning, and it is chiefly owing to this that the company attained to that perfection in artistic *ensemble* and that fine distinction of *nuances* in each separate scene which made 'dead moments' no longer possible. Such methods as these were naturally dependent on the extraordinary devotion displayed by every member of the company, from Stanislavsky himself down to the humblest super; the study and preparation of a new play seldom occupied less than half a year, and must have made great demands on the patience of all concerned. At the same time the success of such a system required a large measure of public enthusiasm; Stanislavsky had to make two new productions suffice for a whole year, and this was only possible with a *clientèle* that might be counted on to fill the house for a run of a hundred performances of the same piece.

Stanislavsky's guiding principle as a producer was an almost fanatical insistence on fidelity to life—his final aim was to make every incident or emotion represented on the stage an exact reproduction of actual experience. He even went so far as to insist that the actor should himself feel the emotion which he had to portray; his rehearsals, consequently, were conducted with the greatest possible strictness and an almost cloistral solemnity. In order to induce a certain definite emotional state in his actors he would spend months, even years, in preparation; thus, if he wished to surround a piece with an air of brooding melancholy, he would retire with his actors to some secluded spot where he would keep them from all communication with the outer world until every movement, every accent of the voice, even their very thoughts, expressed the desired mood; the result was that astonishing semblance of reality with which his actors contrived to invest their acted emotions.

The naturalistic method was not confined merely to the acting—it extended also to the *mise-en-scène*, as was evident in the opening performance of the Art Theatre in October 1898 when the setting for *Tsar Feodor* was remarkable for a purity and consistency of style never before achieved; the costumes were carefully copied from examples of the period, and all the stage properties were either genuine or exact reproductions of historical objects.

When *Othello* was down for production an expedition to Cyprus was arranged in search of local colour; before *Julius Caesar* was put on Nemirovitch-Danchenko and Simov, the scenic artist, journeyed to Rome, to make studies on the spot. In order to secure an accurate setting for Ibsen's *Brand*, models of furniture were ordered from Norway, while for plays dealing with the daily life of the Russian *bourgeois* the objects actually in daily use were carefully copied, so that the citizen who visited the theatre saw on the stage precisely the same surroundings as those to which he was accustomed at home.

A point on which Stanislavsky laid particular stress was the treatment of stage crowds, and here he proved himself to be a truly great reformer. Hitherto the supers had almost invariably stood motionless in the background, while the dramatic action was left entirely to the principals—Stanislavsky was the first to make his crowd a living thing. So unaccustomed was the public of that day to anything of the kind that on one occasion it almost led to a regular panic in the theatre. The play was Maxim Gorky's *Children of the Sun*, in which a pogrom occurs; when suddenly a raging, shrieking, wildly gesticulating crowd rushed on to the stage many of the audience thought that it was an actual rebellion and got up to leave the house, with the result that the curtain had to be brought down in a hurry.

It was soon evident that the Moscow Art Theatre was the ideal house for plays of the naturalistic school, and it was here that the works of Ibsen and Tchekov were first worthily performed. Tchekov's *Seagull*, in particular, which had failed completely at the Alexander Theatre, was a triumphant success when given under Stanislavsky's direction. The author was lying ill at the time, and so was unable to be present, whereupon the entire company journeyed to the Crimea in order to cheer the sick man with a performance of his own masterpiece. From that time Tchekov's works, especially *Uncle Vanya* and *The Cherry Orchard*, formed the strongest attraction in the *répertoire* of the Art Theatre, the performances in all amounting to over a thousand. Nemirovitch-Danchenko was right when he said to Tchekov after the first performance of *The Cherry Orchard*: "Our theatre is indebted to you in every respect—to your genius, your pure soul, your tender heart; you may safely call it *your* theatre."

Gerhardt Hauptmann is another who owes his popularity in Russia to Stanislavsky, who was the first to draw attention to his plays and to reveal their meaning to the Russian public; among others who owe their fame to the same cause we may mention Maxim Gorky and Leonid Andreïev, both of whom were practically unknown till the Moscow Art Theatre took them up and helped them to success.

Part of Stanislavsky's original plan was to train up a new generation of players, and with this object he had established a number of dramatic schools—'studios' they were called—on quite original lines; these schools were responsible for nearly all the actors and managers who were destined later to exercise so powerful an influence on the development of the Russian theatre.

With the arrival of the Moscow Art Theatre the Russian *bourgeoisie* had created a dramatic style of its own, just as in the earlier part of the century it had produced its own literary forms,

and the result was so novel and so significant as to compel the attention of a surprised and fascinated Europe. So long as the trend of art in Russia had been determined by the Court and the nobility the country had blindly accepted what Europe had to give; now the tables were turned, and as with the rise of the Russian realist literature as a whole found itself suddenly the richer by the introduction of an entirely new element, so Stanislavsky's theatre, thanks to its fanatical sincerity and still more to its unique stylistic quality, became the model for the entire world. Hitherto the visit of a Russian theatrical company to Western Europe had been looked upon rather as a curiosity; Stanislavsky's European tour was enough to assure him the almost undisputed leadership of the international theatre for a long time to come.

Realism, however, is not the only form of theatrical art whose growth is connected with the rise of the *bourgeoisie*; almost simultaneously with the beginnings of the Moscow Art Theatre there sprang up a second and entirely distinct development, which must also be reckoned as a *bourgeois* creation—this was the 'stylistic,' or purely decorative, theatre.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century Russia had come to some extent under the influence of the æsthetic movement which was the fashion at that time in Western Europe, and which, in opposition to realism, or facing the truth, aimed definitely at drawing a veil over many of the unpleasant facts of existence. Moreover, now that the *bourgeoisie* had practically won the battle for social equality, many of them thought it only reasonable to support that power which promised the best security for the possession of their newly acquired rights. Although the younger members of the *bourgeoisie* had stood primarily for freedom and revolutionary activities, there were not a few among them who, now that they had attained to wealth and position, became supporters of the Pan-Slavonic Imperialist party; now that they were thoroughly content with their own condition they were inclined to view the whole political and economic situation of the country in a rosy light; to do this, however, it was necessary to swallow a considerable amount of illusion, and to shut one's eyes, more or less deliberately, to the actual state of affairs.

From the endeavours of certain sections of *bourgeois* society to escape from the ugly truths of everyday life into an imaginary world where all is fair there arose the 'stylistic' theatre, which offered the sharpest possible contrast to the naturalistic method, and which, as time went on, came to stand for a certain type of æstheticism, deliberately remote from actuality, and, in the end, even reactionary in its nature.

This new movement in the theatre was started by a small group of artists and amateurs who met at the house of the Moscow manufacturer, Mamontov. Like Stanislavsky, Mamontov began by giving amateur performances, and proceeded later to build a public theatre; but while Stanislavsky, with his passion for naturalism, confined his interests to the drama proper, Mamontov felt specially drawn to the opera, and determined to devote his theatre chiefly to that form of art. His real value lay in his having been the first to realize the great importance of the scenery, and to win general recognition for this principle; in his theatre the ability of the actor

was of less consequence than the beauty of the stage-picture, and the greatest geniuses of his company were to be found, not among the actors and singers, but in the scenic artists.

The art of scene-painting had hitherto been held in small esteem, especially in Russia; public interest had always centred in the actors—everything else was a matter of mere theatrical contrivance, necessary, but not important. The scene-painter was scarcely looked upon as an artist, his name being hardly ever mentioned even in the most elaborate productions—in fact, he was regarded as just a person employed by the theatre, like the mechanic, the carpenter, or the costumier. The turning-point came with a performance of Ostrovsky's *Little Snowwhite*, given at Mamontov's own house in 1882, which, though it attracted little attention at the time, had most important results for the future. The scenery for this occasion was the work of the young painter Vasnetzov, and served as a model of its kind well into the twentieth century. When, three years later, Mamontov opened his opera-house in Moscow with a ballet called *The Nymph* Vasnetzov designed both scenery and costumes; but the novelty of the style was so disturbing that the public at first merely laughed and stayed away. A similar fate befell the next two productions, *Faust* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Verdi's *Aïda*, with a *décor* by Korovin, was received with a certain amount of approval, though even here opinions were divided; but it was the public performance of *Little Snowwhite*, with Vasnetzov's setting, that won the first great success for the new movement.

Mamontov's venture, however, was only short-lived, and for a reason which does honour to the man himself. He was the first person to work energetically for the cause of Russian music, and to endeavour to win recognition for it, in spite of the opposition offered by the prevailing taste of the time. Since Glinka's day Russian opera had made no progress worth mentioning, but with Rubinstein's *The Demon* a new era had just begun; this was followed in quick succession by Moussorgsky's *Boris Godounov*, Tchaikovsky's *Opritchnik*, and the early operas of Rimsky-Korsakov, none of which made much impression on the Russian public, who, in their enthusiasm for Italian opera, firmly refused to give even Wagner's works a hearing. All through the seventies and eighties every opera-house in Russia was occupied by Italian companies, and the crowning triumph was reserved for Adelina Patti in *La Sonnambula*.

It was at a time like this that Mamontov determined to come to the assistance of Russian music; to this end he produced a series of the most important works of living national composers, but at such a loss that he was finally compelled to close his own opera-house.

Yet, short as was its existence, Mamontov's venture worked nothing less than a revolution in the world of the theatre; the business of the stage-setting was now entrusted for the first time to real artists, and it became evident that the contribution of the scene-painter could be something more than the mere technical adjunct it had hitherto been considered. It is especially significant that the æsthetic movement started by Mamontov and his circle, with its insistence on the importance of the pictorial element, soon found its way to the Imperial Theatres, possibly through some dim apprehension on the part of the Court party of how well such methods corre-

sponded with their own political views. Volkonsky, the director of the Imperial Theatres, sent for the painters Golovin and Korovin, formerly members of Mamontov's company, and entrusted them with the setting of the ballets *The Swan Lake*, *Don Quixote*, and *The Magic Ring*, and even after Volkonsky's resignation the two artists continued their connection with the Imperial Theatres for the purpose of carrying out the desired reforms.

Mamontov, meanwhile, had started a paper with the title *Mir Iskustvo* ("The World of Art"); its editor was Diaghilev, who was to become famous as the founder of the Russian Ballet, while the painters Benois, Bakst, Korovin, Simov, Serov, were among the more important members of his staff. The paper was intended primarily as a definite protest against the naturalistic movement which by that time had invaded the sphere of painting; in direct opposition to the younger Russian school, its supporters showed a preference for subjects taken from the past—the eighteenth century or still earlier ages—and these they treated in a spirit of absolutely unrestrained fantasy. In a little while nearly all the members of the *Mir Iskustvo* group had turned their attention to the art of scene-painting, and so became the actual founders of that style which was to excite such universal admiration in the production of the Russian Ballet.

The place of Mamontov's defunct enterprise may be said to have been taken by the private opera-house opened in Moscow by Simin, in which every encouragement was given to the new style of staging plays; the management attached the greatest importance to the artistic side of the production, and even offered prizes for novel designs for scenery. This gave opportunity to young men of talent, such as Fedorovsky, who began his career by winning a prize for the best setting of *Carmen*; the gifted artist Bilibin with his notably original setting of Tchaikovsky's *Le Coq d'Or*; Konchatovsky, who did the striking designs for *Kalashnikov the Merchant*—to say nothing of Polenov, Yegorov, Roerich, and Sudeikin. Simin's opera-house, moreover, was the first Russian theatre to form a museum of theatrical decorative art which to-day is one of the most valuable historical collections in Russia.

A remarkable part in the fight between realism and the picturesque was destined to be played by the actor-manager Vsevolod Mayerhold, a former pupil of Stanislavsky, who had changed his views and fallen entirely under the influence of the 'stylistic' school. This future director of the revolutionary theatre began his career in St Petersburg in the theatre belonging to Komissarshevskaia the actress; he then passed on to the Imperial Theatre, where his first production was *Tristan and Isolde*. His staging of Molière's *Don Juan*, with scenery by Golovin, made an extraordinary sensation, this being the first occasion on which the division between the stage and the auditorium was done away with. The colour-scheme of Golovin's scenery harmonized with the rest of the interior, so that the stage seemed merely a continuation of the 'house,' and the actors made their entrance and exit straight through the audience; the footlights were abolished and the orchestra-space replaced by a proscenium; the whole performance was a remarkable achievement in the 'stylistic' manner, and, as such, achieved a great success.

Mayerhold and Golovin next collaborated in some pieces for the Alexander Theatre—



Ostrovsky's *Storm* and Lermontov's *Masquerade* among others. Perhaps the high-water mark of their new method was reached in *The Show*, by Alexander Block, with reference to which the author wrote an enthusiastic letter to Mayerhold in which he declared that the stage-setting had revealed his own work to him in an entirely new light. The scenery in this instance was supplied by Sapunov, a young painter who did some very important work during his short career.

Although this purely decorative treatment of the stage was productive of many very valuable experiments in the beginning, the exaggeration of its methods was bound to lead, after a time, to a dangerous cramping of certain other functions of the dramatic art. As the beauty of the stage-picture increased, so did the actor tend to become nothing better than a dressed-up doll; in the designs of Sudeikin, Sapunov, and others he was just a mere splash of colour in the scenic composition, to which every movement, every gesture, had finally to be subordinated. The actor was no longer called upon to act—the more he confined himself to standing still and statuelike on the spot assigned him by the scenic artist, so much the better did he fit in with the general effect. When Mayerhold staged *The Death of Tintagiles* for the Komissarshevskaia Theatre he grouped his actors so as to resemble frescoes and bas-reliefs, in order that their three-dimensional bodies might interfere as little as possible with the effect of the stage-picture.

It often happened in those days that the public broke out into loud applause as soon as the curtain rose for the first time on some new stage set; but when in the course of the play the actors began to move about the wonderfully composed stage-picture gradually lost more and more of its original effect; thus it soon became evident that it was not possible to subordinate the theatre, which, from its very nature, must be subject to dramatic laws, to purely pictorial considerations, or to make the eye the final arbiter of all. However fascinating the spectacles provided by the 'stylistic' theatre might seem on paper, or when first seen on the stage, this exaggeration of the merely picturesque could not hope to endure for any length of time; its decline was hastened by the painful and constantly recurring conflict between the natural three-dimensional nature of the stage and the flatness essential to painted scenery. Consequently there grew up a sort of *relievo* technique, which demanded that the actors should move about only on certain prescribed planes parallel to the background, a method that hardly coincided with the methods of certain actors of importance. However, this very same 'stylistic' technique, which was soon found to be impracticable where drama was concerned, led to the most admirable results when applied to ballet and pantomime; this form of art aims at nothing more than providing the spectators with a rich feast of beauty for the eye, and for this purpose the new picturesque style of production was peculiarly suitable.

Ever since the first invasion by the Italian players in the eighteenth century the ballet had always occupied a prominent place on the Russian stage; as time went on every new development of this art in Western Europe found its way to Russia, in connection with the visits of great dancers, such as Taglioni and Fanny Elssler. But while a radical change was taking place in the regular Russian theatre during the second half of the nineteenth century, the ballet in

Russia remained almost at a standstill, gradually crystallizing into a classical mould, as perfect in form as it was essentially lifeless. It was the time of the elaborate *ballets-d'action* which filled the bill for a whole evening, with their rigid choreographic conventions, their pirouettes, solos, and apotheoses—the very sameness in the construction was bound in time to create an impression of monotony; the public were not long in finding this out, and so the great popularity of the ballet began to wane, in spite of the exceptional talent of several of the dancers, both male and female. In the first years of the twentieth century there was still little difference between the ballet in Russia and that of Western Europe; both were based on the usual classical traditions which had originated in Milan, Paris, and Vienna; but in St Petersburg a certain number of enthusiasts had by this time clubbed together with the determination to build up a new kind of ballet on an entirely different foundation. The organizer of this enterprise was Diaghilev, the editor of *Mir Iskusstvo*.

As it soon became evident that there was no hope of accomplishing the desired reform in Russia itself, where the classical style of ballet carried all before it, Diaghilev, in conjunction with the painters Benois and Bakst and the dancer Fokin, decided to start a season in Paris with a Russian company; he had already visited that city in 1905, and made such preliminary arrangements as enabled him to open at the Théâtre Châtelet in 1907.

His first ballet *The Pavilion of Armida*, with scenery by Benois, amazed the Parisians by the unparalleled brilliancy of the spectacle, the gorgeous wealth of colour, the novel freedom of the choreographic movements which were unfolded before them; with the first performance of Diaghilev's company the movement which had begun in the Russian *bourgeois* theatre with the operatic enterprises of Mamontov now entered upon the period of its most perfect achievements.

Nor was the scenery the only surprise; the peculiar style of dancing introduced by Diaghilev's company—henceforth to be known to all as the Russian Ballet—was something entirely new. Fokin, the leader and trainer of the troupe, had discarded every rule of the classical tradition—his object was to make the dance the expression of the primitive joy of living, a sort of Bacchic ecstasy, so to speak, and he and his artists succeeded in creating, by means of dance and dumb-show alone, an atmosphere not only of the tenderest beauty, but charged with a rapture and passion that carried all before it. The dancers, male and female, had nearly all been members of the Imperial Ballet in Moscow and St Petersburg, and so had gone through the severest possible training in classical dancing; the knowledge thus acquired they were now able to apply to the novel rhythm of a gracious art that seemed a very close approach to nature.

The first appearance of the Russian Ballet in Paris at once aroused enormous interest, and was regarded as an event of first-class importance in the history of the theatre. The instantaneous success of Diaghilev's company was due not only to the art of the dancers, but also to the efforts of their talented collaborators, the scenic artists. Chief among these were Benois and Bakst, who designed a whole series of gorgeous scenes and costumes in an entirely novel style, remarkable for a lively riot of colour far surpassing anything that had yet been seen on the stage. Such things as Benois' setting for *The Pavilion of Armida* and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Schéhérazade*, together

with Bakst's *tableaux* in *Salomé* and *Tamar*, have become models for scenic artists throughout the world. The third place in order of merit must be given to Roerich, whose talent lay in the presentment of scenes from the antique and the early Middle Ages. While Benois preferred the brilliance of the *baroque* period, and Bakst gave us fantastic and passionate scenes filled with all the glowing colour of the Orient, Roerich was master of a style which made the old heathen world of primitive Russia, the world of the Norsemen and the Varangians, live again before our eyes, as in his setting of Stravinsky's mystical pantomime *Le Sacre du Printemps*, one of the painter's best performances.

Of special interest are Bakst's costume sketches, which show this painter's peculiar talent at its best. His figures are nearly always presented in the graceful decorative poses that occur in the dance, while the costumes are studied in motion rather than repose. This is partly the explanation of the fascinating impression produced by Bakst's work when seen on the stage; he is probably the only artist of the purely decorative school whose compositions resemble not so much a mere piece of dead painting as an actually living and animated picture.

The world-wide success achieved by Diaghilev in Paris induced the Russian Imperial Ballet to visit that city in order to make acquaintance with the new art and its chief exponents, Fokin, Nijinsky, Anna Pavlova, and Tamara Karsavina, nor was it long before the Russian Ballet was seen in Russia, where, as in every other country, it was hailed as an artistic revelation.

So strong was the impression made by the new method of *décor* that Stanislavsky himself felt obliged to yield to public opinion and engage Diaghilev's scene-painter for the Moscow Art Theatre, although, as might have been expected, this risky attempt to combine two such essentially different forms of art met with but little success. When Roerich staged Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* for Stanislavsky in 1911 it was plain at once that the new scenic surroundings interfered with the customary business of the actors, and that the general style of the setting was not suitable for the Art Theatre. Nor was Benois any more successful, although he, of all Diaghilev's artists, was the one best suited to the intimate style of Stanislavsky's theatre. He staged Molière's *Le Malade Imaginaire* and three of Pushkin's dramatic sketches, *The Banquet in Plague-time*, *The Stone Guest*, and *Mozart and Salieri*; but in each instance one was painfully conscious of a certain exaggeration in the *décor*, which, while admirably suited to the Russian Ballet, was out of harmony with the Art Theatre. The matter is best summed up in the pronouncement of a certain Russian critic, to the effect that this production had "transformed Pushkin's pieces, which were intended to be heard, into something that appealed only to the eye."

The truth is that all these scenic artists were of far too pronounced an individuality ever to fit in with the complete picture, the harmonious whole, which was Stanislavsky's invariable aim; while never failing to display their own talents to advantage, they were unable to blend them with those of the actors and the supreme master of theatrical production. The Art Theatre was no place for men like these, impatient as they were of any higher authority, and so the whole experiment ended in a decided fiasco.

On the other hand, efforts were made to graft the principles of the naturalistic school on the 'stylistic' theatre; at the St Petersburg conservatoire, for instance, a Theatre of Music Drama was founded by Lapitzky, the manager, with the object of mounting operas in a style as true to nature as possible; realism in this case was carried so far that in a performance of Tchaikowsky's *Eugene Onegin* the hero, while singing his big aria, was made to sink deep in the snow, and then to display his boots to the audience, all covered with white.

Although these experiments excited some interest at first, the impossibility of treating an essentially unnatural form of art like opera in a naturalistic manner soon became only too evident, and after a little while these attempts also were abandoned. The very fact that neither the naturalistic nor the stylistic theatre was able to preserve its original purity was a sign that both these movements were tending gradually toward a blind alley. Under Stanislavsky's management the performance of the individual became more and more subordinated to the general effect; the liberty of the actor was so cramped and curtailed that he finally became an unresisting tool in the hands of the all-powerful producer. At the same time the mode of presentment at the theatre came perilously near to the realism of the photographer; every effort was made to give a meticulously exact imitation of such things as the sound of falling rain, the grating of a key in a rusty lock, or the jangling of sleigh-bells; meanwhile the imagination of both author and actor was being gradually sacrificed to this exaggerated devotion to a purely materialistic conception of truth.

The extraordinary lack of balance in the Russian temperament, which will admit none but extreme solutions, had brought the Moscow Art Theatre to a condition which was aptly described by the critic Valery Briussov in 1902. "This theatre," he wrote, "thinks it is fulfilling its mission when everything on the stage is in as perfect correspondence with actuality as it is possible to make it. The actors take pains to talk exactly as men talk in taverns, the scenic artists give us pictures that are exact copies from nature, and the costumes are doubtless the result of archaeological research. Yet, when all is said and done, there are certain things which this particular theatre cannot reproduce. The most careful imitation of nature must always remain imperfect: there is little real difference between Stanislavsky's device for imitating the sound of falling rain and the primitive labels exhibited on the stage in Shakespeare's day. Scenery can never be anything but a signpost to serve as a guide for the imagination. . . . When a storm has to be represented on the stage the howling of the wind 'off' and the visible swaying of the property trees are of far less importance than that the actor should comport himself as a man overtaken by a storm would do. Consequently it would be wiser to forego such elaborate imitation and employ only such surroundings as do not distract the attention of the public from the actor. Naturalism has degraded the stage—it has banished everything that is truly of the theatre, and destroyed the whole scenic scheme on which its existence depends."

The 'stylistic' theatre, on the other hand, by laying even greater stress on the purely decorative side, had proved equally sterile; it ended by making the actor altogether superfluous, something

that might easily be replaced by a doll—in fact, the only logical outcome of this movement was the Marionette Theatre—those “Super-marionettes” which Gordon Craig had tried in all seriousness to introduce.

As soon as the *bourgeois* theatre—by the way of naturalism on the one hand, on the other by an exaggerated stylization—began to eliminate the individual performer it was plain that its doom was sealed. The same ferment which was clearly discernible in the social organism of Russia at the beginning of the century was at work also in the theatre, although in both cases it was many years before the process of disintegration was fully revealed.

Under these circumstances it was inevitable that a protest should be made against the state into which the Russian theatre had fallen; as things were, young actors and producers saw themselves compelled to choose between the rigid naturalism of Stanislavsky and the equally rigid conventions of the ‘stylistic’ theatre, and an ever-increasing number were dissatisfied with either solution. In the year 1912 there appeared, almost simultaneously, three separate reformers who set to work, on not dissimilar lines, at a revival of the Russian stage—Evreïnov, Mardshanov, and Tairov. The first of these published a book about this time, *Das Theater an sich* (“What the Theatre stands for”), in which he pleaded for the salvation of the theatre as one of humanity’s most sacred possessions; five years earlier, when he was acting as producer for the Kommissarshevskaia Theatre, in succession to Mayerhold, he had written an article *An ‘Apology for the Theatre’* in which he upheld the theory that form is the one essential quality of all art. “The distorted outward shows of life,” he asserted, “must be transformed into a beauty beyond the reach of ordinary sight or hearing”; the stage must become “our new schoolmaster, whose teaching will bring the glamour of the theatre into our daily life.” In his book we find this theory developed; the imagination of the spectator, he insists, needs only a stimulus to enable it to create a world of its own; this stimulus is lacking when the stage shows us everything exactly as it is in real life.

“What the audience need,” he writes, “is imagination, not naturalism—an image of the object, not the object itself—a concept of the action, not the action itself. The essence of the theatre is illusion; the stage has its own realism, but this has nothing whatever in common with the realism of actual life.” We see that what Evreïnov demanded was the abolition of a too objective method of representation, which, by giving complete expression to every idea, left no opportunity for the spectator to exercise his own imagination. The reformer even tried to put his theories into practice, and, with that object, established his “Old Theatre,” where the earlier masterpieces of all countries were to be given in as free a form as possible. At the same time he took pains to imitate the old methods, for he believed that former ages had quite rightly regarded the stage as a purely artistic medium, and that the very simplicity of the settings had left plenty of room for the exercise of imagination on the part of the audience. Evreïnov employed several scene-painters connected with the stylistic movement, but took care that they should confine themselves exclusively to making sketches for scenery. All the productions at this theatre were inspired by the spirit of pure theatricalism, in accordance with Evreïnov’s theories, and the result

was something entirely and undeniably different from anything that had been done by either the naturalistic or the 'stylistic' group.

Side by side with Evreinov's experiments, Alexander Tairov, one of the younger producers, was making a similar attempt to free the theatre from the bondage of objectivity. In 1912 Tairov had resolved to quit the stage for ever, in the conviction that it had forfeited whatever vitality and artistic value it had ever possessed; but he happened just at that time to get into touch with Mardshanov, the wealthy theatrical enthusiast, who was about to start a Free Theatre, where the best brains in Russia and from abroad were to work together for the reformation of the drama.

Mardshanov's particular aim was to do away with that specializing tendency which separated the functions of the singer from those of the actor, and put the dancer in a different category from the acrobat; he resolved to create a Synthetic Theatre, which would be able to give tragedy, farce, opera, and pantomime with equal facility. He dreamed of a sort of universal artist, who should be singer, dancer, and actor in one; this type, he maintained, had existed not only in classical antiquity, but also in the Middle Ages and down to a quite recent date—it was naturalism, with its passion for psychology, that had first brought about a merely artificial separation between these originally related forms of the Mimus, and it was just this restriction of the actor's art to one particular field that was the cause of all the shortcomings in the theatre. Such, at least, was Mardshanov's opinion, and he proceeded to try to break down these limitations accordingly. The "opera singer" was gradually to be changed into the "operatic actor," who would combine musical qualifications with dramatic ability: in like manner the dancer was to possess the actor's power of expression, while certain acrobatic properties were to be shared by all in common.

The Free Theatre to which Mardshanov hoped to attract his 'synthetic performers' had but a short existence; nevertheless the idea that had here been realized for the first time still survived, and was further developed in the theatre that Tairov was now to establish; he had been one of Mardshanov's producers, and his short experience in the Free Theatre had convinced him that it must still be possible to find a new theatrical manner. Accordingly in 1914, just after the outbreak of the War, Tairov opened the Moscow Kamerny Theatre, one of the most interesting of all pre-Revolutionary experiments; its basic principle was a direct reversal of the principles of the naturalistic equally with those of the 'stylistic' school, and his immediate object was to protest against both. He had long realized that each of these movements must end by reducing the actor to a position of absolute insignificance; under Stanislavsky's *régime* he would soon be nothing more than the disc of a gramophone, with nothing to do but reproduce the author's text with the utmost possible fidelity, while on the 'stylistic' stage he would degenerate into a dressed-up puppet, a mere splash of colour.

"Our starting-point," Tairov tells us, "was the purely negative conviction that our method was to be neither naturalistic nor 'stylistic.'" This attitude of pure protest was entirely in keeping with the revolutionary spirit, as yet unconscious, which had infected a great part of *bourgeois*

society by that time. Not only in Russia, but throughout the whole of Europe, the first decade of the twentieth century had produced a new generation whose instincts and activities were concentrated on a single protest—against tradition, against all that had gone before, against the whole existing system. With some dim foreboding, perhaps, of the coming catastrophe, in almost every country at that time were to be found groups of people engaged in the endeavour to demolish all existing forms of art, in order that from their ruins a new and better order might arise. Consequently the formula “Protest for its own sake” was adopted to express the only attitude possible toward the existing state of affairs. In the general uncertainty as to the nature of the new methods to be followed the reformers clung firmly to their one principle, that, in any case, they must be radically different from those that had hitherto obtained.

It was the time when in Europe the Futurists and, later, the Expressionists, were working to strip both painting and poetry of the character and meaning hitherto associated with them; to destroy “the language of art which had crystallized into mere formalism,” in order that the voice of nature might again be heard, as in a new creation. These movements rapidly extended to Russia, where they found their most striking expression in that revolutionizing of the theatre upon which Tairov had entered with some initial success. In direct opposition to the naturalistic and ‘stylistic’ schools, he aimed at creating an ‘emancipated theatre,’ to be accommodated wholly to the needs of the actor and his art. In his opinion the cause of the critical state of the theatre might be traced, in the last resort, to the shocking decline of good acting. He maintained that the actor’s art is of all the most difficult, since it is the only one in which the artist has to identify himself with the material in which he works. In view of the enormous difficulties raised by the actor’s twofold relation to his art (as both subject and object at the same time) it was not surprising that more of the *dilettante* spirit was to be found in the theatre than anywhere else. It was not sufficient for the actor to possess talent, or to feel a call to the stage—the one condition of all success was rather an immense amount of preliminary work, which alone can lead to a perfect mastery of the body with all the physical means of expression. That ‘fidelity to life’ at which the naturalistic theatre aimed meant the death of acting, since it deprived it of all creative impulse, and transferred it from the realm of art to that of psycho-pathology. “In order to experience an emotion that is ‘true to life’ one must *not* be an actor—actual experience and stage emotion are two very different things; with a certain gift of observation and an excitable nervous system anyone can be taught the latter—it needs no creative faculty; all that is wanted is the ability to conquer one’s natural bashfulness so far as to do in public what one could do better when alone.”

Stage emotion, he maintained, could never be naturalistic; it must derive its strength not from real life, but from the unreal life of the stage picture which the actor summons up from the magic realms of fancy—in short, the actor’s business is with the world of art, not of personality.

It was Tairov’s belief that one of the essential conditions for the attainment of pure artistic effect was a complete mastery of the body (the outward technique), since no emotion can find

effectual expression unless the outward form it takes be correct; as in art nothing must be accidental, so the actor must not leave the expression of his emotion to chance. Another of his theories was that the 'emancipated theatre,' the seat of pure histrionic art, must henceforth be freed from the fetters of literature. Literature, he asserted, had never produced dramatic art—indeed, the process had constantly been reversed; consequently the new theatre was not to be the creation of literary men—rather was it to owe its existence to itself, and the result would be a new kind of literature. This theory pointed logically in the direction of the impromptu stage which had flourished so notably in the old Venetian *commedia dell' arte*; this, in Taïrov's opinion, was the highest development of the 'free' theatre, unhampered by theories or literature of any sort. Accordingly he made a special study of the Italian theatre before Goldoni, with a view to reviving the *commedia dell' arte*, with its typical figures, modified in accordance with the modern spirit.

Such a course inevitably led to the complete suppression of the intellectual element in the 'book' of the play—the theatrical performance was doomed to sever its connection with written literature; this, however, was in complete agreement with the revolutionary aims of the time, which were everywhere directed to the demolition of all established forms.

The *répertoire* of the Moscow Kamerny Theatre was naturally rather varied and haphazard; as everything was judged as a spectacle, and æsthetic expression was all that mattered, the subject of the piece was of little importance. Thus did Taïrov become the originator of Russian expressionism in the art of the theatre.

The first production of the Kamerny Theatre was the Indian play *Sakuntala*, with scenery by P. Kusnetzov. True to his determination to avoid anything in the way of naturalism, Taïrov took special care not to suggest too close an affinity with the theatre of ancient India; even the scenery did not go beyond slight suggestions of local colour. In the course of the next two years Kusnetzov's work at the Kamerny Theatre was supplemented successively by Larionov, Goncharova, and Sudeïkin. In 1916 Lentulov and Madame Exter began to paint for Taïrov, and later on passed permanently into his employ.

One of Taïrov's fundamental requirements with regard to *mise-en-scène* was that space, which both in the realistic and 'stylistic' theatres had been treated as static, should now be considered from a dynamic point of view. For this purpose he evolved an entirely new way of dealing with the stage floor, and this constitutes the most important of his reforms. Whereas hitherto all scenic artists, with rare exceptions, had confined themselves exclusively to back-cloths, wings, flats, and costumes, Taïrov made them turn their attention to the actual floor of the stage; this was practically done away with, and the space occupied by a number of horizontal or inclined planes of varying height. The spatial effect was to be vertical rather than horizontal—each actor was to be exhibited on his particular pedestal.

Along these lines Madame Exter, the scenic artist, speedily developed a special technique by an arrangement of certain cubist figures, stylistically treated, such as cones of various sizes,



pyramids, and flights of steps. Such were the elements from which the stage of the Kamerny Theatre was henceforth to be constructed; the primary forms employed were usually quite simple, but a lively effect was obtained by the use of colour gradations in great variety; in this way it was sought to overcome that inartistic flatness, that disintegration of the stage-picture into a series of parallel planes, one behind the other, with no stereoscopic perspective to connect them, which was one of the chief defects of the purely 'stylistic' theatre. It was a fundamental principle with Tairov that on the stage the actor should always be the first consideration, while the painter's art should serve merely to create an atmosphere which would enable him to display his abilities to the best advantage; at the same time he was not to imitate nature, but to strive for the "theatrical truth" which, in Tairov's view, was perhaps just as 'true,' in the highest sense of the term, as a faithful copy of life itself. In this respect the Kamerny Theatre was to illustrate, in Gauguin's words, "the profound truth contained in the artistic falsehood."

Thus on the very eve of the political Revolution, as a protest against the naturalistic and 'stylistic' theories, the *bourgeoisie* had discovered in the methods of Evreïnov, Mardshanov, and above all Tairov yet another artistic form—"the theatricalized theatre," we may call it—that was destined to put the actor and his art before every other consideration. The Kamerny Theatre represents the last *bourgeois* attempt at theatrical development, as well as the beginning of the actual revolution in that particular field. Although Tairov's aims, as we see in the "Protest," were revolutionary, he was never able quite to free himself from the fetters of æstheticism; indeed, in his complete neglect of all literary values, he carried the æstheticizing process even farther than the 'stylistic' theatre had done. When, shortly after the Revolution, the Kamerny Theatre company visited Paris André Antoine denounced their methods as the gravest possible menace to the European stage. "Everything in their performance," he wrote, "their scenery, their costumes, their style of acting, aims at the destruction of our dramatic traditions. These Russian players, who are here to make converts, will be the less surprised by the coldness of our reception when they consider that we have never failed to draw attention to the originality of many of their ideas and the interest attaching to their aim; at the same time we are not prepared to acquiesce in our own complete annihilation."

But though Western Europe looked upon Tairov's reforms as peculiarly representative of the Russian revolutionary theatre, this view was based on a complete misunderstanding of the facts. It might easily appear as if the Kamerny Theatre aimed at the destruction of the artistic methods of the *bourgeois*, but actually, like the "Protest for its own sake," which was the offspring of futurism and expressionism, the Kamerny Theatre, which was the result of the "Protest," never went beyond the ideas current in *bourgeois* circles. After the real catastrophe the leadership of the movement was soon to pass into the hands of other and more drastic reformers.

## Chapter IV

### THE PEOPLE'S THEATRE

IN Stanislavsky's autobiography we find the following description of a certain memorable performance at his theatre: "It was the evening before the October Revolution. The Kremlin was surrounded by soldiers—it was plain that some sort of secret preparations were going forward; the streets were filled with a constant stream of silent people bound no one knew whither. Some of the side-streets were quite dark and empty—even the police were not on duty. In the theatre a huge crowd had assembled to see a performance of *The Cherry Orchard*, a piece dealing with the life of the very people against whom the Revolution was directed. Behind the scenes we could hear the murmur of excited voices from a house filled almost exclusively with the common people; both in front and behind the curtain brooded a feeling of uneasy suspense. We actors, dressed and made up, stood waiting for the performance to begin, listening meanwhile to the hum of the crowd in the electrically charged atmosphere of the auditorium. 'We shall never be allowed to finish the play to-night—they will hoot us off the stage'—this was the thought in the minds of all of us.

"With the rise of the curtain we quite expected the uproar to begin; but the halo of pathetic beauty with which Tchekov surrounds the passing of the Russian nobility—a subject peculiarly unsuited, one would have thought, to the occasion—did not fail in its effect even at this crisis. To judge from the close attention with which the audience followed us, we must have given one of our happiest performances; it seemed as if people were eager to snatch a moment's breathing-space amid the realms of poetry, and to take their leave of the past in the atmosphere of the theatre.

"The evening ended with tumultuous applause—the audience then went out in perfect silence to the streets, many a one, no doubt, prepared to risk his life for the new order of things. It was not long before shots were heard in all directions; we ourselves could not leave without a good deal of trouble indeed, our lives were constantly in danger."

Thus, when the Revolutionary fever was at its height, at a moment when the minds of all men were fixed on the immediate approach of a tremendous catastrophe, the people of Russia were still capable of enjoying to the full the wonderful art of Stanislavsky and his collaborators in that play of Tchekov which is, perhaps, the highest achievement in Russian dramatic literature.

Never perhaps has art come victorious through such a fiery ordeal (in the strictest sense of the words) as on that evening when the public overwhelmed the actors in the Moscow Art

Theatre with applause; even later, at a time when, with fearful convulsions, a new world was in process of formation from the ruins of the old, men would turn aside again and again from the street-fighting and the endless processions of 'demonstrators,' and seek refuge in Stanislavsky's theatre, there to follow attentively those scenes which a great author had chosen to construct from the tangled lives of a world that had been overthrown. Evening after evening the play was received with frantic applause, for the new public, the crowd of soldiers and workers, paid the same reverent homage to the genius of Tchekov as the *bourgeoisie* had done before them.

It is impossible to say how long this state of things might have lasted, had it not been for the intervention of the 'Intellectuals,' who not only protested against any form of 'art' in the old *bourgeois* sense of the term, but condemned the pieces in the ordinary *répertoire*, as well as the methods of performance, as being likely to lead the people astray, which was a criminal offence. The proletariat, they declared, would no longer consent to be fooled by the false view of life presented by the older theatre; it demanded new writers and a new form of entertainment which should utter the glorious political battle-cries of revolutionized humanity.

Meanwhile, since the very people in whose names their leaders had taken upon themselves to protest against the old theatre continued regularly to frequent and enjoy its performances, the 'Intellectuals' soon found themselves constrained to have recourse to the same methods of annihilation which they had already employed against all other social and domestic institutions; for the great battle-cry of the Bolshevik Revolution was "revolt against everything that had formerly existed, a complete break with every kind of inherited practice, a total repudiation of the past with all its traditions."

These principles were now applied to the art of the theatre, and hasty efforts were made to produce a new form of theatrical entertainment that should be radically different from anything that had gone before. Up to the time of the Bolshevik upheaval even the boldest innovations had retained some sort of connection with the past, if it were but in the association that must arise from contradiction; but now it was resolved to break every possible link with former ages, and to seek a fresh answer to the question, what the theatre really is, what are its functions, what its real aim. The revolutionizing of the theatre soon became one of the most important branches of Soviet propaganda, and, like all Bolshevik measures, was at once provided with an elaborate 'ideological basis.'

The social revolution, it was maintained, necessarily implied a revolution in cultural ideas; it demanded that all culture should be subordinated to the efforts of the workers in their struggle to build up a new society. The theatre, they asserted, had never kept pace with the actualities of life, which it treated as of merely secondary importance; it had become a house of refuge for ideas which had already been eliminated from life itself; divorced from reality, it had endeavoured to go its own way, and for that reason had preached the doctrine of eternal beauty. But what the workers needed was a theatre that should take an active part in building up the

Soviet Union, help on the Revolution, work systematically on the feelings of the audience, and so contribute to the development of a new humanity.

From the theory that the stage should co-operate in revolutionizing the masses was born the idea of the 'Propaganda Theatre'—which was now accepted as the foundation of all Bolshevik theatrical activities. The task of accomplishing this tremendous transformation of the theatre was entrusted by the Soviet Government to Vsevolod Meyerhold, the well-known manager, who, soon after the outbreak of the Revolution, was made director of the whole movement. Backed by political authority and given every sort of encouragement, this man now set himself to organize the theatre for the purpose of Bolshevik propaganda, and to establish Revolutionary theatrical centres throughout the whole of Russia; thanks to his efforts the actors became a sort of auxiliary force of the Red battalions, and a central organization was established on the lines of the regular army. The next step was the formation of theatrical shock-troops, which, on orders from headquarters, proceeded to any district which seemed particularly in need of some strong political agitation. All over the country appeared countless flying theatres, dispatched from the capital; these set up their stages mostly at the railway stations of small villages, and there proclaimed the gospel of Bolshevism to the crowd of peasants who assembled to hear them.

In Russia, where so many millions were unable to read, propaganda by means of the theatre was almost the only possible way of quickly familiarizing the masses of so huge an empire with an entirely new set of ideas, and so winning them to the Revolutionary side. The director of this new art, the Field-Marshal of the united Left Wing of the theatre, was Meyerhold, and his headquarters were known as the Meyerhold workshops; it was here that the plan of campaign was worked out, and the fighting forces dispatched to all parts of the country.

This theatre-army soon became one of the most important and indispensable pillars of the Communist propaganda, and was recognized as such by the Government. The esteem in which Meyerhold was held by the men of the Soviet State was clearly manifested at the time of the jubilee celebration of the twenty-fifth year of his artistic career, when a whole battalion of Red troops appeared on the stage of his theatre and congratulated him in the name of the Army, while the Government signified their approval by a formal letter of good wishes and the bestowal of the honourable title of "the People's Artist."

From the moment that the Bolshevik authorities recognized the tremendous importance of the theatre as a means of propaganda they took pains to extend its influence as widely as possible; they soon conceived the idea of organizing spectacles which need not be confined to the limited space of a building, but might be accessible to an infinitely greater number of onlookers than such places could accommodate. Their plan was to get the masses themselves to take part in public performances on a gigantic scale, using the street itself as the scene of action; parades, processions, popular *fêtes*, were to be carefully planned and methodically built up to form an effective whole. A new catch-phrase was devised by the Dictators: "Live

theatrically! Act your daily life!" and by this means they hoped to develop a system of propaganda on a scale impossible in the theatre itself. The men who invented and managed this Theatre of the Masses were Mayerhold and Evreïnov, the former champion of "the Theatre for its own sake." They now proceeded to organize, independently of each other, a number of mass-festivals in Moscow and St Petersburg, that were to deal directly with incidents of the Revolution and the present Bolshevik *régime*. Their object was twofold: as politicians they trusted, by the constant repetition of their Communistic catchwords, to impress a Revolutionary psychology on the masses, while, as artists, they hoped that from these novel devices would be begotten an entirely new theatrical art, of a grandeur never before dreamed of. In arranging their spectacles the dictators had some idea of imitating the artistic methods of the festivals associated with the Egyptians, the Roman Emperors, the Renaissance princes, and the leaders of the French Revolution; though, naturally, the performances of the Communist proletariat would be far in advance of these, just as everything that happened in Bolshevik Russia had to be much grander and more momentous than any achievement of the past.

The first performance took place in front of the St Petersburg Bourse, under the direction of Evreïnov, at which symbolic *tableaux* were shown, intended to glorify the liberation by the Bolsheviks of downtrodden humanity. In these mass-festivals certain regiments of the regular Red Army took part side by side with the best actors of the Revolutionary stage; they presented, in the form of a mystery play, the successive attempts made in the course of the centuries by the oppressed classes to shake off the yoke of their oppressors and exploiters. The villainy of the tyrants, whether emperors or priests, merchants or financiers, was depicted in a way that all could understand, and finally, after the many unsuccessful rebellions of the past, Bolshevism was shown triumphing gloriously over the whole company of their enslavers. The performance ended with a grand military parade, a general chorus, and a festal procession in which the public took part.

One of the most interesting of the mass-festivals was the theatrical representation of the storming of the Winter Palace, at which, on the third anniversary of the establishment of the Soviet Republic, the historic events of October 25, 1917, were re-enacted on the original spot; the performance took place in front of the Winter Palace, and the public, about 60,000 in number, were crowded into the adjoining squares. Evreïnov was responsible for the scenario. In front of the palace two rostrums, connected by a bridge, had been erected, to form a stage for the dramatic action; the 'White' rostrum represented the world of reaction, the 'Red' that of the Revolution; these were alternately lit up or left in darkness, according to the sequence of incidents, and on them were enacted, realistically or symbolically, the recent political events, from the overthrow of the Empire to the triumph of Bolshevism. The performance began at 10 p. m. with the firing of a cannon and a fanfare of trumpets; then the searchlights were turned on, and showed the representatives of reaction assembled on the 'White' rostrum—the Provisional Government, with Kerensky at its head, officials, the nobles of the old *régime*, country

gentlemen, bankers, and similar figures of the pre-Revolutionary world, all highly caricatured. These people gave a stupid exhibition of affectation, servility, and mutual toadyism, until the proletariat appeared on the 'Red' stage, prepared for the decisive victory.

The connecting bridge was now brought into play for a hand-to-hand struggle, which swayed to and fro for some time, till it ended with the triumph of the Revolutionary forces; the 'Whites' were compelled to fly, and took refuge in the Winter Palace, as actually happened in 1917. From this point the action became purely realistic; soldiers were rushed to the spot, motors filled with armed men raced by, cannon were fired, and the shooting became wild and general, an active part being taken by the cruiser *Aurora*, then lying in the Neva. Finally the Winter Palace, the last refuge of reaction, was stormed; a gigantic transparency of the red Soviet Star flamed out on the front of the building, the band struck up the *Internationale*, and all ended with a big procession of the victorious 'Red' soldiers, and a general chorus.

One of the biggest spectacles of this kind was planned for the *fête* to be held in the Khodinsky Field, near Moscow, in 1921, but the preparations were conceived on so gigantic a scale that, like many others of the same sort, it never came off. The subject was *The Struggle and Victory of the Soviet*; in order to do it justice Mayerhold demanded 2300 infantry, 200 cavalry, 16 guns, 5 aeroplanes, countless armoured trains, tanks, motor-cycles, and ambulance corps, besides military bands and choirs. But the scheme fell through, and a play in verse entitled *Mysteria-Bouffes*, by the Revolutionary poet Maiakovsky, was given instead. This piece, which was meant to be a dramatic synthesis of the Russian Revolution, was merely a succession of symbolical scenes, entirely stupid and tasteless; it will serve as an excellent example of the crude amateurishness of all these experiments.

"The whole world is submerged in the deluge of the Revolution"—so runs the scenario. "The only dry ground still remaining is in the neighbourhood of the North Pole, and even here there is a fissure, which an Eskimo is endeavouring to stop up with his finger. The small number of human beings who still survive are crowded round the Pole in their endeavour to escape from the rising waters; these include seven couples of clean *bourgeois*, seven couples of unclean members of the proletariat, and a few half-hearted persons who are anxious to settle the differences of the opposing parties, and some others. As room is scarce, they kill the Eskimo, who had succeeded so far in stopping up the hole; immediately the fires of revolution break out through the opening; all endeavour to put out the flames and finally succeed in plugging the hole once more. The clean people then urge the unclean to devise some plan for the general safety, whereupon the latter proceed to build an ark. The second scene shows the ark on its voyage. The stage represents the deck of a ship, with the Negus of Abyssinia in command; the *bourgeois* establish a democratic republic, but are soon thrown overboard, and the hungry and unclean seize the power, but just as they are about to refresh themselves with food and sleep the ark goes to pieces. The survivors now realize that the time has come for a struggle for life; they cast aside the fragments of the wreck, and, trusting solely to their own

strength, scale masts and rigging and rush headlong through the clouds. The priests endeavour to stop their progress with threats of hell, but Beelzebub himself has no terror for men who have looked on the hellfires of the white-hot metal in the steel-foundries.

"The fourth scene takes us to Paradise and shows us the incorporeal, though godlike, existence depicted by those who would have us look for happiness in a world to come—or who are in favour of merely gradual reform in this one. These pilgrims, however, have set before them a different and a higher goal—Paradise is trampled down, and, over its ruins, they pursue their stormy way, ever onward and upward.

"The fifth *tableau* shows us a wrecked and ruined world—all that was left to the unclean ones who had survived the War and the Revolution. Impossible as it might seem even to attempt to build a new and happy world from such a state of misery and desolation, the unclean were able to triumph over all obstacles, cheered by the vision of the fairer future already dawning over the coal-pits and the oil-fields. The sixth scene opens with the triumph of Communism, the general joy and amazement of the unclean over the new world which is seen to raise its head behind the mountains of labour—and a communal chorus of jubilation brings the piece to an end."

Another of these mass-plays was performed in 1922 at Ivanovo Vosnesensk, in which the whole town took part. This was a theatrical reproduction of the great strike of 1915, which had ended with the shooting of a large number of workers. Still later Mayerhold's production of the Revolutionary play *The Restive Earth* was given in a revised form, and in the open air, when the actors were reinforced by certain troops of 'Red' soldiers.

Apart from the political usefulness of these performances, their organizers may possibly have been inspired by the hope that a new style of drama would be developed, and also by the desire to create an art-form which might be adapted to the requirements of the great mass of the people. In this they relied on the strong partiality of the Russians for the drama; they felt they could reasonably depend on their willing participation in such exhibitions. The Russian mind, as their leaders recognized, is not easily impressed by abstract arguments—it seems rather to demand the pictorial and scenic embodiment of an idea. Their leaders, indeed, could appeal to the exalted example of the Orthodox Church in Russia, which has always laid great stress on the importance of theatrical display; had not the Bolsheviks adopted similar methods for the propagation of their new ideas the dissemination of Communistic teaching on so huge a scale would never have been possible. In thus attempting from the very outset to utilize this characteristic of the Russian people for the furtherance of their own object the Soviet leaders displayed their political acumen as well as a certain ethnological instinct; but it soon became evident that their hopes for the development of a new dramatic style were not to be fulfilled—even the founders of the mass-theatre had to confess that these exhibitions never got beyond a crude and clumsy symbolism with but few traces of originality. One good result, however, remained—the idea of reproducing historical events in dramatic form, more

especially in the cinema, where the universal fame achieved by the Russian films *Potemkin* and *Bloody Sunday* testifies to the great artistic possibilities latent in subjects of this kind; it must be noted, moreover, that success in these cases was achieved not by any sort of improvisation, but by the greatest possible care in the business of preparation, rehearsal, and production.

To the young manager Eisenstein belongs the credit of realizing what might be done by developing these crude mass-spectacles and using them for the purpose of 'the pictures'; he it was who originated the chronicle-film, and by so doing gave a most valuable stimulus to the technique of the cinema. In his productions he discarded, almost completely, the connecting plot, as it is understood in the *bourgeois* theatre, as well as in the European and American film, and actually succeeded in building up his effects on the adventures of the impersonal crowd.

Side by side with the efforts of the organizers of the great mass-spectacles to induce the people to take part in them, an attempt was made to develop an actual proletarian theatre, and to get the masses to write their own pieces for it. For this purpose use was made of the numerous amateur theatres which had sprung up, particularly in the clubs of the Red Army; these were now encouraged to write their own plays. The troops had already shown a lively interest in theatricals, whether in barracks or when at the Front, during the struggles with the *bourgeois*. Thus in the campaign against Koltschak the soldiers gave several performances of *The Red Ural*, a piece written by a shoemaker while in the trenches; in Astrakhan a play called *The Sacrifice of Freedom* was given in the Tartar language, and at halting-places *en route* the men performed a play written by a common soldier, with the object of discouraging desertion.

Soon, however, many of these groups, under the influence of their dictators in art, ceased to produce works by individuals, preferring instead the combined efforts of a syndicate of authors. Dramatic societies and circles were formed who undertook the joint production of "plays with a purpose" for the use of amateur theatres; for great holidays, such as the anniversary of the October Revolution, or the 1st of May, these syndicates composed a great number of pieces, often in the form of burlesques dealing with the actual events of the time from a Revolutionary point of view. Thus there gradually arose a kind of theatre for which not only did the people provide the actors, but the pieces performed were the work of the impersonal masses.

This development was particularly gratifying to the political authorities as offering the best possible method of diffusing Bolshevik ideas among the people; if soldiers, peasants, and industrial classes could be induced to write Revolutionary pieces and perform them there was every reason to hope that in a very short time the leaders would be in a position to control the very thoughts and imaginings of all this multitude.

However deplorable and impossible the production of these syndicated authors may appear from the artistic point of view, their political importance was undoubtedly very great, and the men who conceived and carried out the whole plan of campaign so methodically must be credited with a real genius for Revolutionary propaganda.

Nor did the Bolshevik rulers pay less attention to the older form of the theatre to which



the *bourgeois* had hitherto been accustomed. They were not long in recognizing the mistake of attempting to transfer the theatre altogether to the streets, and thus forgo the advantages which must result from performing in an enclosed space and on a raised platform. More than once in the history of revolutions the stage had been the starting-point for new political ideas which were destined to be realized; in a certain sense the French Revolution may be said to have begun with *Le Mariage de Figaro*, and the Belgian upheaval of 1830 with the historic performance of *La Muette de Portici*.

However, in order to avoid any conflict between the two types of dramatic representation, it was necessary to reform the older institution in accordance with the changed ideas as to the aim and scope of dramatic art. In the Bolshevist conception 'art' could have no independent existence, it was merely a means of political propaganda; consequently the theatre must be made an instrument of Revolutionary agitation. Its functions were to be twofold—to serve, on the one hand, as a platform for orators who would urge the overthrow of all established authority, and, on the other, as a pulpit from which the Bolshevik gospel might be preached to the people—*i.e.*, the doctrine of the abolition of the individual by the development of collectivism, or the idea of the mass-man. Finally, every play should provide the public with a practical demonstration of this new type—the organized, impersonal mass. No longer must the theatre fill the minds of the spectators with foolish ideas about the destinies and emotional problems of individuals—its task was rather to reproduce group-experiences, to incite to objective action, and thus imbue the public with the spirit of collectivism.

Such aims as these had obviously nothing to do with the art of psychological expression; the interest of the old theatre had centred largely in the clash of conflicting temperaments—in the Bolshevik theatre every trace of individuality was to be rooted out; the action must no longer depend upon the individual performers, but solely on the entire collective entity. To attain this end little attention need be paid to emotional expression; the chief stress must be laid on those things which are common to all humanity, every kind of physical action, such as walking, running, jumping, gymnastics. Only in externals do we find the elements from which a real community of interests may be built up for all mankind; the inner life presents such an infinity of variations and is so inextricably bound up with the very essence and destiny of the individual that it can never serve as a basis for a universal brotherhood.

Henceforth, then, the chief duty of the actor, as a member of this new collective society, was to develop his bodily powers to their highest perfection; his movements were all to conform to a certain conventional type which all must use in accordance with the latest and simplest formula. To this new system Mayerhold gave the name of bio-mechanics; its object was to train the actors to a perfect mastery and the right use of all physical movements, so that in this way the inner life might also be brought out and transferred to the surface. Mayerhold accordingly devised and enforced a complete method of gymnastic exercises, beginning with running, climbing, 'physical jerks,' and jumping; by exhibiting these practical accomplishments in

the theatre it was hoped that the audience also would learn in time to become useful and profitable members of society. It was deemed necessary likewise to banish from the stage all outward indications of individual personality, such as variety of costume, etc. Mayerhold, accordingly, invented for his actors a simple form of working dress, a sort of blue overall, which was practically the same for both sexes.

Now that the psychological character-studies of former times had been replaced by physical culture, subtle and polished dialogue by energetic feats of climbing, running, and jumping, the actor's surroundings also had to undergo a radical change in order to correspond with his new bio-mechanical constitution. Mayerhold began by abolishing the curtain, that symbol of mystery which had hitherto separated the world of the stage from that of the auditorium; the scenes and wings of the older theatre were next condemned as no longer desirable, associated as they were with the "false *bourgeois* atmosphere of individualism"; the new stage must be made conformable to the fact that it was now the domain of the new man, the physically stalwart apostle of collectivism. Henceforth everything which tended to create a picturesque illusionary effect was ruthlessly banished; the old painted scenes and flats were replaced by 'constructions' of wood or iron, which in their bald simplicity were meant to indicate the technical environment in which the new humanity would grow up. "Our artists," declared Mayerhold, "must throw down the brush and compasses, and lay hold of axe and hammer for the shaping of that new stage which must be the pattern of our technical world." The proletarian stage was to be purged of all associations connected with history or antiquity—the symbolical representation of the new technical spirit seemed infinitely more important than "the senseless display of form and colour."

In all these attempts to revolutionize the theatre the moving spirit was Mayerhold, and the headquarters of the entire reform were the Government Workshops of the Higher Theatrical Board of Management, established by him in 1921. Here the actor "who had become demoralized and degenerate under the influence of the *bourgeois* theatre" was to be moulded into the tool of the new mass-organization for the purposes of political propaganda; here too were devised the new Revolutionary stage-settings, from which all the old conventional scenery was eliminated.

This fanatical campaign of Mayerhold against every traditional idea of scenic beauty strikes one as all the more remarkable when we remember that only a few years before he had been a strong supporter of the purely decorative methods of the 'stylistic' theatre, and had himself devised settings in the manner of Botticelli; however, this tendency to veer round to the other extreme is typically Russian, and numerous examples of it are to be found in the political history of that country.

One of the earliest opportunities for Mayerhold to put his theories into practice was in a performance of the Revolutionary piece *The Restive Earth*. On a perfectly bare stage nothing was to be seen at first but a few constructions of wood and iron, several guns, a field-kitchen,

and an aeroplane. After a bugle had sounded for the play to begin some automobiles drove right through the auditorium over a bridge connecting it with the stage, and were followed by a number of cyclists in uniform. Then came a representation of the last phases of the World War, with plenty of shooting and fighting, and a constant succession of motor-cars and -bicycles rushing to and fro; the wounded were conveyed to the dressing-station, generals issued idiotic orders, and the rebel soldiers climbed on to the various constructions and proclaimed the Revolution. Next came the War with the *bourgeois*, represented in similar fashion, and finally the hoisting of the first Red Flag, with an endless crowd of people following it; the 'Red' troops arrive on the scene and take possession of the stage, the auditorium, and the *foyer*; the public rise to their feet, and all strike up the *Internationale*.

Some time later a similar Revolutionary piece was performed at Mayerhold's theatre; it was called *D. E.*, and can only be described as one of the maddest experiments of its kind. The 'book' was an adaptation of Ilia Ehrenburg's tale *Der Trust D. E.* ("The Trust for the Destruction of Europe"), with the addition of some scenes from B. Kellermann's *Tunnels*. The plot—if it can be said to have one—shows how the American capitalists had got the whole of Europe, and even the Soviet Republic, into their clutches, and how the Bolsheviki contrived to bore a submarine tunnel between Leningrad and New York and so march a Red Army into America. This singular piece was an indiscriminate jumble of cinema pictures, inflammatory speeches, statements as to the economic progress of the Soviet Union, all interspersed with buffoonery of the silliest description; there is a scene in England, for instance, where the members of the House of Lords, being threatened with destruction, eat each other up, while in other scenes Mayerhold's system of bio-mechanics is illustrated by a prolonged gymnastic display.

But the classical example of bio-mechanism is the comedy *The Magnificent Cuckold*. In this the movements of the performers were so standardized that they seemed to obey some geometric law; the stage-setting was a complicated system of terraces, staircases, and lifts; large revolving wheels were also employed, in order to register the various emotions that prevailed from time to time in the breasts of the actors. Then, when the betrayed husband was supposed to rage with jealousy his particular wheel would revolve at terrific speed, while in the actor's quieter moods it hardly moved at all.

Another extreme example of the constructivist style was Mayerhold's production of the comedy, *Tarelkin's Death*. In this piece, which was intended to be a skit on the *bourgeois* stage, all sorts of queer 'properties' were introduced; for the usual tables and chairs were substituted rickety structures which were meant to suggest no more than the dynamic essentials of the various pieces of furniture, while such things as jugs and glasses were dwarfed and distorted like the furniture of a doll's house.

Two other pieces given about this time at Mayerhold's Theatre of the Revolution were a political satire on Kerensky, entitled *Don Juan's Return*, with *mise-en-scene* by Komardukov, and

Toller's *Masses and Man*, which was staged on strictly constructivist principles, the action taking place on sloping terraces of different heights, connection between which was established by means of moving staircases, cable railways, and cranes. Except for these dynamic constructions the stage was absolutely bare, without backcloth, wings, or flats.

In spite of all these new-fangled experiments, the pieces thus treated were in many cases taken from the old *bourgeois répertoire*; Toller's play was the only one inspired throughout by the Revolutionary spirit. *The Restive Earth* was originally a piece by Martinet, called *Night*; while *The Magnificent Cuckold* and *Tarelkin's Death*, so far from being of Revolutionary origin, were derived from authors of the good old *bourgeois* times.

The scarcity of pieces suitable for the new methods of production was apparent from the very beginning of the movement; the older dramas, based as they all were on the clash of individual destinies, were fundamentally opposed in form, construction, and technique to the new ideas. What was wanted was pieces in the style of the massed scenes of the cinema, which impress the spectator by means of purely physical activities; but so far the dramatic world had produced no parallel to the technical and social revolution in progress.

Not that there had been any lack of experiment; the Bolshevik authors, as well as the numerous workers' and soldiers' clubs, had produced countless pieces, each one more amateurish, more worthless, than the other. Mayerhold saw only one way out of the difficulty—he resolved to adapt the literature of the old world to his own purposes; to this task he set himself with all the recklessness of a Revolutionary, in many cases preserving hardly anything of the original but the title and the *dramatis personæ*. On being attacked for taking too many liberties he replied, "But did not all those great masters whom the whole world agrees to honour do just the same—Sophocles, Shakespeare, Schiller, Tirso de Molina, and Pushkin? Adaptation is always justifiable when it springs from real necessity."

Acting on this principle, Mayerhold recast every play that seemed to him suitable for the new style of treatment. A piece by Claudel was staged on hanging platforms and moving staircases, and the actors were made to move not only to and fro on the level, but also up and down on rope ladders. Ostrovsky's classical play, *The Forest*, was given in a completely new form, the original five acts being cut up into thirty-two episodes, which followed one another like the scenes of a film. Ostrovsky in his drama had criticized the landowners as a class, but not in any spirit of hate; Mayerhold changed the play into a blatant piece of propaganda, turning the landowners into objects of contempt, and bringing in Revolutionary characters by way of contrast. The effect of the poetical scenes was spoilt by an accompaniment of concertinas and similar follies, while the greatest stress was laid on scenes dealing with household work, such as ironing linen or the cleaning of fish.

He even dared to lay violent hands on the most famous comedy in all Russian literature, Gogol's classic *Government Inspector*, which he 'Revolutionized'; but this was too much even for Bolshevik Russia, and it aroused a perfect storm of controversy. Mayerhold was attacked from

every side, and defended himself by denouncing his critics as counter-Revolutionary, and recommending them to the care of the political police. Finally a public debate was held on the subject; Lunacharsky, the People's Commissar, and the poet Andrei Biely spoke on Mayerhold's side; they were opposed by Commissar Semashko, and Demian Bedny, the poet laureate of the Kremlin, who had already denounced Mayerhold as Gogol's murderer.

In this production it is certain that Mayerhold completely altered the character of Gogol's comedy; some scenes were rewritten, new scenes interpolated, additional characters were brought in, and every trace of the individual style of the author effaced. In staging the piece Mayerhold introduced a new and daring device; most of the scenes were played on trucks running across the stage on rails. These trucks carried small platforms, a few square yards in area, and were shunted off and replaced by others, as required; sometimes the particular truck that had just served for one scene was simply run off to the back, and the actors went on with the play in front of the stage without any scenery at all.

Any attempt to criticize such audacious innovations in the usual way is impossible. But still the Russian theatrical revolution was not content with what had been done—for the radical and final transformation of the stage we must turn to Foregger's Atelier, the Proletkult Stage, and the Projection Theatre. Foregger went far beyond Mayerhold; in his Atelier the theatre was degraded to a series of acrobatic tricks and variety turns. His view was that the old world could best be destroyed by making it ridiculous, so he tried to pour scorn on the theatre by parodying it. His productions were little more than a succession of wild clowning and eccentric exhibitions; the orchestra was replaced by the 'noise band,' the ballet by 'machine-dancing,' and for a long time these two new art-forms were accounted the highest achievements of the Revolutionary spirit.

The Proletkult Stage, under the management of Eisenstein, had similar aims. Political propaganda was expressed by travesty, acrobatics, and trick-turns. When a piece of Ostrovsky was performed in a Revolutionary version the actors danced on ropes above the audience, vaulted, threw somersaults, stood on their heads—no trace of the original plot remained.

Thus the Revolutionizing of the theatre ended by turning the stage into a circus. Senseless as this method seems at the first glance, we cannot dismiss it as sheer insanity. When we look more closely into these theatrical experiments we cannot ignore the fact that Eisenstein, who was responsible for many of these eccentric features, has, on the other hand, given proof of quite remarkable skill as director of the great Chronikfilm company. An interesting theory lies at the root of this resort to circus tricks and clowning, though the forms which this theory has assumed in practice are often absurd and futile. The manager of the Proletkult started from the fact that in Russia the circus was older and nearer to the people than the theatre, which had been imported much later from the West; Revolutionary art, therefore, aiming at something new, clung to the tradition of ancient popular buffoonery. At the very outset of Russian history, in the tenth century, Byzantine civilization brought with it to Russia the Byzantine

circus, which became highly popular; a fresco in the Cathedral of St Sophia at Kiev, supposed to have been painted in 1073, shows a group of circus acrobats, dancers, and musicians. Though the Byzantine circus declined in popularity later, one element of it remained in existence as a typical part of every Russian popular *fête*—the Fool, the Jack Pudding, often mentioned in Russian chronicles of the eleventh century. All through the centuries from the tenth to the sixteenth there were Fools in Russia, and even in the seventeenth century, when the theatre of Western Europe had driven out the popular farces, clowns were still to be found in their booths at the great fairs. These people's jesters amused their audience with coarse, ribald, and sometimes seditious jests, and not only made the masses merry, but voiced their grievances against their rulers. Dearest to the people's heart were the Court jesters—a regular institution from early times—who sometimes played quite an important part in politics. The Court Fool the only man who dared to speak his mind, to whom everything was permitted, could tell the Tsar the truth, and show him what his people really thought and felt. For many years the jester acted as an advocate of the oppressed classes at the Tsar's Court. The popular jester gradually developed a primitive natural style of comedy, which generally consisted of a series of acrobatic feats, low-comedy turns, and dialogues, interspersed with music. In the seventeenth century the first professional rope-dancers came to Russia, headed by Lodigin, who soon set up a school of his own at Moscow for training acrobats, and was well paid by Peter the Great. The great Tsar patronized the circus, and invited the most celebrated artiste of the day, Carolus de Eckenberg, to come to Russia after seeing his skill on a visit to Berlin. With Eckenberg the Western circus began to invade Russia, crowding out the native popular farce and its clowneries. Circus tours of foreign troupes became more frequent as time went on, and about 1750 a regular circus on the European model existed at St Petersburg, and was largely patronized by the lower classes. German and Italian rope-dancers, strong men, and acrobats came in a stream, and caused great enthusiasm; the most popular were the troupes of the Italians, Brambilla and Nomorra. From the end of the eighteenth century onward the circus was a regular institution in Russia, and developed along the same lines as in the West, gradually supplanting the primitive popular diversions of the early ages. The Bolshevik theatrical reformers tried to go back to the style of the primitive Russian clown, as was plainly shown in the Projection Theatre, where the stage had vanished and the performance was given in the middle of the auditorium; it consisted of gymnastic performances lasting for hours, an incessant running and jumping, interspersed with juggling and rope-dancing.

Thus the revolutionizing of the Russian theatre led to a number of the oddest, most violent experiments, the reformers respecting nothing that had hitherto been accounted an immutable law of the stage. Just as in social matters all the principles of *bourgeois* law were swept away, as in ethics every vestige of individual independence was destroyed, so in the theatre the champions of reform determined to do away with everything that recalled the old conception of the theatre.

It was not long before the many different paths explored in the search for novelty began to meet; the elements of one new style were merged in those of another, and the result was general chaos, followed by the collapse of a large number of the new theatrical experiments. At present Mayerhold's Theatre is the only representative Bolshevik stage in existence, and has developed a regular form of Revolutionary theatrical art; he is the only one who must be taken seriously, in his attempt at a new dramatic style.

Whatever we may think of it, the Revolutionary theatre has become an important phenomenon of Russian life. Repulsive as we may find the idea of stripping the stage of its æsthetic and literary significance, and using it as a weapon of political strife, we cannot help admitting that this new theatre has had a powerful effect upon the masses. In Revolutionary Russia the theatre and everyday life are closely linked, and this explains the wide influence of the Russian stage, as well as its startling eccentricities.

But as in other departments of human life, so in the theatre the Bolshevik experiment of breaking with the past and creating something entirely new was bound to fail. In politics, in economics, and also on the stage it was soon found necessary to revive institutions that were thought to be finally abolished. An appreciation of this fact may have induced the People's Commissary, Lunacharsky, one of the cleverest and keenest-sighted men in the New Russia, to call a halt to the destruction of all the old forms, even in the first chaos of the Revolution. When many fanatical theatrical reformers wanted to do away entirely with the stage Lunacharsky came forward in its defence. In a letter to Mayerhold he declared that the theatre was a living organism, and its loss could never be made good again. "The destruction of all traditions," he said, "would be an act for which the proletariat would bitterly reproach us in later years. It is easier to pull down than to build up, and therefore we ought to leave the question whether we still need the old art of the theatres for a later decision.

"The State Theatres have by a process of natural selection gathered round them the highest artistic talent; to take away the centre of this talent would mean the destruction of culture, without raising the general level. Besides, these theatres are not dead mummies, they are capable of developing further by the very laws of their being. The Revolutionary atmosphere in which we live and breathe will contrive to inspire even the conservative theatre with the spirit of the age."

Thus, from the start, the fanatical enemies of the older theatre were opposed by another school of thought, seeking not to destroy the treasures of the *bourgeois* world, but to keep them safe for the awakened proletariat. With this view Lunacharsky arranged that the former State Theatres should continue unmolested. They were henceforth grouped under the name of Academic Theatres, and were allowed to preserve their classical traditions under the new *régime*, though now and then they were compelled to make some concession to the modern taste.

The Marie Theatre at Leningrad and the Little Theatre at Moscow clung most closely to a conservative policy. The Marie Theatre was still the nursery of the 'stylistic' stage, while the Little Theatre went on priding itself on giving Schiller and Shakespeare and the *bourgeois*

comedy of Ostrovsky's time, excellently acted, for this theatre relied rather on the talents of individual actors than on the general production, and still pursues the same policy. The greatest actors of the first half of the nineteenth century, Tchepkin, Motchalov, Sadovsky, and Lensky, played at the Little Theatre, and their modern successors, Yushin, Sadovsky, Yermolova, Leshovskaia, and others, are now trying to follow the example of their predecessors. In addition the Little Theatre possesses a staff of talented scenic artists of the *bourgeois* period, such as Korovin, Simov, Vesnin, Arapov, and Dobujinsky.

In Moscow, too, the Grand Theatre still remains the leading house for opera and ballet. Its *répertoire* includes, besides Italian and other Western pieces, operas by the Russian composers, Moussorgsky, Tchaikovsky, Borodin, and Rimsky-Korsakov. The stage-setting of these pieces generally followed tradition; only now and then were modern experiments attempted. One of these was the new production of *Carmen* by Sanin, with scenery by Fedorovsky. In this production the colour effects were especially striking, and an effort was made to bring the scenery into harmony with the music; remarkable, too, was the animation of the chorus-work, and the lighting effects were in the highest degree original.

The production of *Lohengrin* was a second 'modern' effort. In this case the scenery was replaced by neutral-tinted curtains and contrasts in light and shade, and a remarkable attempt was made to enhance the effect of the overture and the *intermezzi*, by the illumination of the stage; the idea was to reduce the importance of the merely acoustic effect, and subordinate it to the general conception of the production—an attempt which roused great opposition among the singers.

Ballet at the Grand Theatre had to submit to various reforms; constructivist ballet-scenery was employed, as in the production of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Capriccio Espagnol* and Stravinsky's *Petrushka*. War was declared against the 'classical' ballet in the name of 'natural movement' and the 'beauty of the human body'; Revolutionary critics held that neither the artistic methods of the Court dancers, nor those of Diaghilev's ballet, were in the spirit of the times—the modern dance ought to be acrobatic, based on the "dynamics of modern life." Lukin's appointment inaugurated a revolution in choreography; he endeavoured to evoke the spirit of the dance from the actual body of the dancers, from physiological instinct, rather than from the music or the old classical traditions. But, apart from such experiments, the Grand Theatre still continues to teach dancing on the lines laid down by Fokin and his colleagues, though this art must necessarily strike the Russians of to-day as a curious survival from a very different epoch. Most interesting of all, perhaps, has been the development of the Moscow Art Theatre since the Revolution. This was the house where formerly the theatrical tastes of the *bourgeois* had found their most perfect satisfaction, and Stanislavsky has told us of the problem he had to face in the endeavour to impress his artistic ideas on an entirely new public. Unlike the Revolutionary managers, he did not feel bound to confine himself to plays strictly in accordance with proletarian ideas; the worker, he maintained, goes to the theatre in the hope of finding a different world from the one he



knows—so for some time the Art Theatre kept to its old repertory. However, this soon became impossible; the theatrical revolutionaries exerted their growing authority, and forced even the Art Theatre to make concessions. The first innovation was the production of Byron's *Cain, a Mystery*, in 1920. In this Stanislavsky cut loose from naturalism and followed the course of the 'stylistic' theatre; the scenery consisted of simple geometrical forms, lofty halls, and flights of steps—but it soon became clear that the actors could not do themselves justice in this unwonted setting—there was a jarring conflict of methods, and *Cain* was a pronounced failure.

Stanislavsky was so discouraged by this, the first great defeat in his theatrical career, that for a considerable time he attempted nothing new, since he could not bring himself to go over entirely to the Revolutionary school. Finally he accepted an invitation for a several years' tour abroad, where the success he achieved with pieces by Tchekov, Alexei Tolstoy, and Gorky, besides certain dramatizations of Dostoïevsky's novels, may possibly have compensated him for the rejection by the Russian public of his latest work.

Meanwhile his colleague, Nemirovitch-Danchenko, still managed the Art Theatre, and was giving special attention to the Musical Studio, which he had founded, for the performance of opera, operetta, and comedies with music. The idea of this Studio was the same as Mardshanov's, who had tried to form 'synthetic actors' in his Free Theatre; similarly Nemirovitch-Danchenko, too, dreamed of rearing a generation of artists who would be able to command the whole range of theatrical talents, and shine with equal lustre as actors, dancers, or opera singers. The first production of the Musical Studio, Lecocq's classic *La Fille de Madame Angot*, was a huge success; Madame Gortinskaia had designed some charming scenery, which gave the impression of old-fashioned engravings come to life: the style of the performance was quite in harmony with this feeling, and so won general approval.

After *La Fille de Madame Angot* and Offenbach's *La Périchole* came *Lysistrata*, freely adapted from Aristophanes, with *mise-en-scène* by Rabinovitch. The setting was moderately constructivist, and consisted merely of a row of conventional white pillars, standing out from a deep blue sky, while the performance was an attempt to realize the 'synthetic theatre,' for acting, singing, and dancing were all employed in turn. Bizet's *Carmen*, too, was produced in modern style at the Musical Studio, with a fresh *libretto*, closer to the original tale by Prosper Mérimée.

The greatest artistic activity, however, was to be found in those Studios, which had gradually been built up from members of Stanislavsky's own company, with the assistance of certain of his pupils. He and Nemrovitch-Danchenko held the view that every young artist had a right to be free to carry out his own plans in a Studio, and with this object to gather associates and pupils round him. In the Studios the traditions of the Art Theatre could be carried on, and its life enriched by the stimulus of fresh generations of actors.

This development had begun already in 1913, when the First Studio was founded, and had even then given performances remarkable for their artistic vitality; after the Revolution it flourished vigorously, especially under the direction of its talented manager Vachtangov. Unmoved

by the Revolutionary catchwords of the day, Vachtangov kept within the limits of purely artistic tradition, and avoided alike a rigid realism and a mere imitation of old methods. As a pupil of Stanislavsky, he remained true, in a sense, to the traditions of his master, but he no longer aimed at reproducing real life in its minutest details; his idea was to create from the ordinary conditions of the theatre a fictitious appearance of reality which, while having nothing in common with actual facts, should be a nearer approach to essential truth. An experiment was made in the First Studio with Strindberg's historical play *Eric XII*, but his methods were more clearly displayed in the production of Gozzi's *Turandot*, by which Vachtangov, shortly before his death, made his reputation.

In this piece an attempt was made to reproduce the Chinese fairy-tale in the form of a modernized *commedia dell' arte*. The actors entered in ordinary walking-dress, bowed to the audience, and changed in open view; the prince put on a linen robe over his coat, and wound a turban round his head, the aged father donned his beard and his costume, the ladies threw shawls over their dresses, and only four Masks, the typical figures of Italian comedy, wore their proper theatrical costume from the start; during the performance those actors who were not wanted on the stage strolled through the auditorium and jested with the audience. These devices aimed successfully at giving the impression of an impromptu performance, got up by the guests at a party where any member of the audience might be called upon to take part in the play. The whole piece had the air of a jolly, free-and-easy, impromptu performance; truth and fiction were so interspersed and blended that the theatre was indistinguishable from real life.

This production of *Turandot* was transferred later from the First Studio to the Third, which was founded by Vachtangov's pupils in memory of him after his death. This Third Studio has also produced Maeterlinck's *Miracle of St Anthony*, Ostrovsky's *Truth is Good, but Luck is Better*, Gogol's *Marriage*, and Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*, all in original and interesting settings.

Less important than these two offshoots of the Art Theatre were the Second and Fourth Studios. The Second Studio suffered from the inconsistency of its repertory, which included dramas by Schiller and Calderon, as well as insignificant efforts by modern authors; the Fourth Studio was hampered by being too deliberately 'stylistic.' The chief productions of the latter company were Maugham's comedy *The Land of Promise*, with scenery by Taldykin, and Muratov's *Coffee-house*, in a setting designed by Pelenkin.

Taïrov's Kamerny Theatre is now reckoned in Russia as one of the Academic Theatres, though it certainly belongs to the extreme Left Wing of the Conservative party. One of Taïrov's first productions after the Revolution was a dramatization of E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Princess Brambilla*, with *décor* by Yakulov. Here all the resources of producer and scenic artist were employed to emphasize the fantastic unreality of Hoffmann's romantic creation—to give the impression of a vague and misty dream.

With the production of the operetta *Giroflé Giroflà* we arrive at yet another new style. Yakulov's scenery was extremely simple, little more than a screen, while the costumes were brightly

coloured and burlesqued as much as possible. The whole production aimed at a mere eccentric stage effect, and the intellectual side of Tairov's theories was ignored.

In 1923, on the return of the Kamerny Theatre company from a tour in Western Europe, they produced *The Man who was Thursday*, an adaptation of Chesterton's novel. Here Tairov adopted the principle of constructivism—he, who once would have been thought a Revolutionist, had got the name in Bolshevik Russia of being a reactionary, a *bourgeois*; to remove this reproach he hastened to adopt many of Mayerhold's innovations, little as he cared for such methods. He went in for moving footpaths and hoists, constructivist and bio-mechanical effects, and tried to reconcile these with his own doctrines of the emancipated theatre and the irregular stage floor. Vesnin, the scene-painter, designed the scenery for *The Man who was Thursday*, which was a complicated structure of intersecting planes, a tangle of posters and illuminated signs—the whole of it painted a sober grey. Here, as we see, the Kamerny Theatre had strayed far from its first principles—it imitated the Revolutionary Theatre, but without approaching Mayerhold's originality.

In 1922 the Romantic Theatre was founded as a sort of Studio for the Kamerny Theatre, and started with two pieces by Alexandre Dumas. Mention should also be made of Ferdinandov's Studio, as having some slight connection with Tairov; the producer's aim was to find a scientific basis for theatrical art, to discover the laws of the drama and apply them systematically; as experiments he staged *Œdipus Rex* and Ostrovsky's *Storm*, with scenery and costumes of an extreme simplicity.

Among the many lesser theatrical companies of the post-Revolutionary epoch the Jewish Kamerny Theatre and the Habima deserve notice. The Jewish Kamerny Theatre, under Granovsky's management, combines remarkable dramatic talent among its actors with a mastery of stage technique, and a pronounced tendency toward Expressionism. Its *répertoire* includes Jewish national plays, the most successful of which has been Shalom Asch's *God of Vengeance*.

The Habima Theatre was really founded by Vachtangov; its members mostly came from Palestine—Jews who, having made their way to Russia, had applied to Stanislavsky to help them in developing their dramatic talents. The master turned them over to his pupil Vachtangov, and he, though a pure Russian who knew not a word of Hebrew, transformed this handful of inexperienced young men into a company of distinguished players.

The members of the Habima Studio rehearsed the whole year long, with unlimited patience, till the last final perfection of word and gesture was attained. The first six months were taken up with repeated readings of a play, at which every member had to make his own suggestions; these discussions, dealing with the work as a whole, were a basis for its study in detail, which also went on in common. It was not till all the characters had been worked out by months of discussion that the actual work of the stage began. The members of the Habima generally obtained some employment to live by, so as not to be forced by material reasons to shorten the time for rehearsal, and thus fall short of perfection. In order to give more time to their art,

nearly all these young people lived in the theatre, often in the wardrobe rooms, and thus their whole life was bound up with the stage. This seclusion from the world must have recalled to many of them the dark and narrow ways of the ghetto.

The most important production of the Habima was Ansky's Jewish tragedy, *The Dybbuk*, staged by Vachtangov himself; the only other piece produced by the company being Pinsky's *Wandering Jew*. Later on other Jewish plays were added to the *répertoire*, and finally performances of Western dramas were given. After Vachtangov's death N. L. Zemach took up the management of the company, and arranged a most successful tour through Europe and America; but in 1927 the Habima got into difficulties and was broken up, and with it disappeared one of the most remarkable features of Russian theatrical life.

All the various daring experiments which have been made in the theatres and Studios of Moscow and Petersburg since the Revolution have had a certain influence on European stage art. The Western theatre, which had already found a stimulus in Stanislavsky's naturalistic actings, and the new style of dancing introduced by the Russian Ballet, looked to Russia after the Revolution, hoping to find some way of escape from the generally critical condition into which the theatre had fallen. Men were so accustomed to receive a new revelation of theatrical art from the East, that they eagerly welcomed the innovations which followed each other in quick succession on the Russian stage; even Mayerhold's experiments with 'constructivism' and 'bio-mechanics' found plenty of imitators in Europe.

But it soon became evident that any such attempts were doomed to failure; the later developments of the Russian theatre are too closely bound up with the Revolutionary hypothesis ever to be accepted by a *bourgeois* society; 'constructivism,' 'bio-mechanics,' the 'noise band,' 'acrobatic opera,' are based on an assumption entirely foreign to our nature—*i. e.*, acceptance of the principles of the Bolshevik Revolution. Though we may allow a serious intention in even the latest and maddest vagaries of the Russian theatre, the whole movement must necessarily be repellent to the European mind; to judge it by artistic standards would be futile, since it has no longer any connection with ordinary stage performances; its only explanation is to be sought in the Russian Revolution with all its mental, moral, and spiritual consequences. This fact may justify the experiments that have been made, but it limits their importance for the world at large. The artistic consciousness of Europe has followed a very different line of social and intellectual development, and will regard 'constructivism,' 'bio-mechanics,' the 'noise band,' and 'machine dancing,' as abnormal phenomena, interesting, but of no further significance.



## **PART II: PHILOSOPHICAL**



## PREFACE

THE second part of this book, disregarding all private and social aspects of the theatre, will confine itself exclusively to an analysis of the methods of artistic representation. It will deal with the historical development of theatrical buildings, with the different forms of the actual stage (with strict regard to the visual motive, by which all art of to-day is conditioned), with their dramatic significance, with the business of stage-management, and with a summary of actual performances. Great isolated achievements of theatrical art do not fall within the scope of this inquiry, neither do its far-reaching relations with historical, social, and general events.

These self-imposed restrictions are made easier for me by the fact that the relations referred to (which are far more extensive in Russia than in any other country) have been treated in the historical section of this work by the distinguished authority Herr René Fülöp-Miller, to whom my thanks are due, not only for consenting to undertake that part of the work, but also for his kindness in allowing me to use for my own purpose the wealth of illustrations he has accumulated.

Further, I desire to thank all those who have helped me both in the matter of my Russian tour and also in the collection of materials for this book, especially the Directors of the National Library at Vienna (which contains the finest collection of theatrical literature in the world), and Herr Otto Pohl, the Austrian Ambassador at Moscow. I also thank the Moscow Academy of Art for their kind reception of my lectures on the state of the theatre in Germany and Austria, and the Society for Foreign Cultural Relations at Moscow for much valuable assistance, and also A. Bakrushin (Moscow), M. Larionov (Paris), V. E. Mayerhold (Moscow), and A. Taïrov (Moscow), whose friendly help and sympathy have enabled me to gain a fuller insight into a new and splendid field of research.

Finally, I must express my gratitude to my dear wife, Felicitas Gregor. I am indebted to her, not only for the excellent arrangements of my tour, which left me free to devote myself entirely to study, but also for the supervision and dispatch of a large part of the invaluable materials collected for this work, on our way home from Russia.

JOSEPH GREGOR





## Chapter V

### THE 'CURVE OF DEVELOPMENT' IN THE THEATRE

THE Russian theatre was the last to impress itself upon the consciousness of Europe. About the middle of the last century, before the modern scientific study of the theatre began, critics already recognized the existence of certain main divisions in the history of the drama—the Greek, the English, and the French theatres were distinguished as homogeneous groups. The Greek theatre was more easily studied, owing to its historical isolation. We could trace the first period, characterized by the dithyrambic chorus, then the so-called 'classical' age, marked by the gradual polishing and shaping of the dramatic form, with a growing tendency of the individual characters of the drama to supersede the functions of the chorus. Next came the disintegration of the purer form that had been achieved, by the intrusion of music and mimetics, and, last of all, the conversational New Comedy of the Græco-Roman age. The historical isolation of the ancient theatre makes it easier to assign it a place in a general survey of dramatic development; very different is it when we consider a case where the isolation is merely relative, such as the English stage. There, from a foundation of sacred and profane drama which was practically the same for the whole of Europe, we see the mighty growth of the English Art Drama suddenly shooting up, just at the end of the sixteenth century; we may point to apparently similar phenomena in the Italian and Spanish drama of the seventeenth century, in the opera of the eighteenth, in the system of international touring companies in the last century, but never again has the theatre reached such a height of absolute, autochthonous power as in sixteenth-century England. Quite another aspect is presented by the French theatre, which cannot be regarded as historically isolated. Its curve of development rises (far more slowly than that of the English stage, constantly deriving new inspiration from the people's theatre) to its highest point in the so-called 'classical age' of Louis XIV, then gradually sinks in the nineteenth century. In Romance countries the rise of the theatre seems to be slower than elsewhere, but its level is maintained for a longer period. The best example of this is Italy, proverbially the native land of the actor, where the theatre never reached so high a point as in England or France, but was far longer in showing any decline; the *commedia dell' arte*, the pageant, and the Italian opera lasted for centuries. It does not seem, however, as if the curves of development of which we have spoken depend solely on the psychology of a nation, for in that case the Spanish theatre, with its rise in the seventeenth century, and its gradual decline, would not be so like the English theatre; the truth is that many influences contribute to the history of the stage—literature, for example, the fine arts, and even the economic and political life of a nation.

On the whole the German theatre presents the richest and most varied field of research to one who seeks to gauge the relative intensity of the life of the theatre, owing to its infinite diversity of localities, local influences, and individual theatres, the continual growth or decline of dramatic talent and the standard of performance, and the boundless admiration or vehement condemnation which it called forth.

The modern study of the theatre aims at tracing its history as an independent development, apart from literature, the fine arts, and other fields of thought; the nearer we get to our goal the more important becomes the methodical working out of the lines along which the theatre has developed, the 'curves' of its life-history. In spite of the very recent severance of the stage, as a subject of research, from other fields of study, we are glad to note that we are already able to trace the mutual reactions between the theatre and other branches of art—for instance, the relations of the ancient stage to ancient drama, of the religious theatre of early Renaissance times to contemporary painting, of the *baroque* theatre to the literature of the seventeenth century; we notice, too, a decided tendency to work back from a general survey of the subject to more limited investigations, and to specialize more and more within our field of study. Thus we have not only systematic treatises on the theatre as a whole, but special studies of its relations to separate nations, literature, districts, and cities—in fact, sectional as opposed to general history, besides monographs dealing with individual events or movements. We have selected the Russian theatre as the subject of our inquiry.

### WAS THERE A MEDIEVAL RUSSIAN THEATRE?

We can have no better introduction to our subject, whether we work out a general curve of development, or choose a theme for a monograph, than to repeat the words we used at the beginning—the Russian theatre was the last to impress itself upon the consciousness of Europe. It was wholly untouched by the age of the greatest dramatic development, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, since it had no connection with Græco-Roman civilization, but belonged to the world of Byzantium and the East. Hence the Russian theatre could not possibly share in the glories of the *baroque* theatre; the Jesuits (the great missionaries of the drama in South-western Europe), the English strolling players, the traditions of Vitruvius and Terence, all these were lacking in Russia. It was an event of great and fatal significance for the Russian theatre when the Greek mime perished from Byzantium; if the mime tradition had been carried not only to the north-west, but to the north-east as well, then at the time when Old Russian painting and architecture flourished—we know their history well enough to say that this was half a century after the Nijny Novgorod period—Russia would also have had a flourishing theatre, resembling the medieval theatre of Germany, though there, of course, we know that the conditions of literature and civilization necessary to favour the growth of the theatre were far more in evidence. But the chief difference between the two countries lay in the fact that the Eastern

Church gives a predominating epic or narrative tone to its liturgy, while the Western Church is vividly dramatic. We must remember that in the West everything is done to set forth the central action, the Mass, quickly, in plastic form, visibly, in the full sight of all, and to invest it with all possible dramatic effect; in Russia the ceremony is veiled, obscured by pictures, symbols, and liturgical chanting—it lasts far longer, and is less open to observation. Such a phenomenon as drama taken straight from the Church Service, as in Germany, where the characters of the *Story of Salvation*, are to be found in the Gospels read in Holy Week, is not only unknown in Eastern Christendom, but would be contrary to its religious sense. We must leave out of consideration, then, those forms of worship which have affinity with drama, and are still in use to this day in Catholic countries; we must forget the dramatic piety that loves to make the sacred story visible in flesh and blood.

If, in spite of this, we meet here and there with a popular Russian religious drama in the seventeenth century it is a matter rather of folk-lore than of religion. Such plays met with no encouragement from the Eastern Church; the Western system of mutual help, the Church giving the Stage material support, and the Stage preaching the Church's doctrines, was unknown. The first Russian religious piece, a Nativity play,<sup>1</sup> is a narrative of the Christmas legend in epic verse, requiring no actual bodily representation of the characters, and hardly any dialogue; and this half-dramatic form appeared at a time when the religious drama of the Jesuits was at the height of its splendour, and was employing great poets to write for it. The Russian piece reminds us of the Italian *rappresentazioni* of the sixteenth century, which have dispensed with the narrator, and are written, not like a drama, but in epic stanza form, with stage-directions annexed in the margin—*The Angel opens the door of Heaven and speaks—the Mother answers—the Son says as follows*, and so on, after which the narrative goes on for some stanzas. Even this is far too dramatic to be a parallel to the Russian form of a century later; to find a Western counterpart for that we must go right back to the French narrative mysteries of the sixteenth century, which we are inclined to regard as the arguments of the great French mystery-plays acted in the Middle Ages.<sup>2</sup> If we accept this comparison we have here the first starting-point of our study on the conception of the Russian theatre; in Russia, however, we have a form of drama gradually evolving itself from the minds of the people, taking its theme from religion, but rejected by the Church; in the French mystery books we see only the fossilized forms of dramas that were once living, but ended their real existence long ago.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Pisny Razlitsbny (Mystery of the Nativity)* (National Library at Paris, Catalogue Teste, Martinov Series, 52). On the subject of this poem compare W. R. S. Ralston, *Russian Folk-tales* (London, 1873), which gives an excellent survey of the characteristic dramatic popular mythology (legends in dialogue).

<sup>2</sup> *La tres excellent et saint Mystere du Vieux Testament par Personnages auquel sont contenus les Histoires de la Bible* (Paris, 1542). It is a dramatic paraphrase of the Bible in strict sequence from Genesis onward, with characteristic prominence given to special subjects—David and Goliath, the Judgment of Solomon, Judith, Joseph, Esther, no narrator, but a regular dramatic form with short stage-directions. It is in rhymed octosyllabic verse.

<sup>3</sup> We incline to the opinion, confirmed by the latest editions (Cohen) of the *Liures de Conduite*, that all the mysteries that have come down to us in literature are weaker reproductions of their original, full-blooded theatrical forms. It is possible that the Middle Ages had a far stronger theatrical sense than one would gather from the texts of the mysteries.

On the same level as this primitive poetry we may place the religious puppet theatre, which must have had a wide and permanent popularity in its time. The precious example preserved in the theatrical museum in Moscow<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 1) shows two stages, and a gallery, like a tower, rising one above another, representing Earth, Heaven, and the throne of God the Father, on the plan so long in favour with the Western mysteries, though afterward completely discarded. Very curious are the three entrances in each of the two stages; these, however, are necessary for technical purposes. A slot, about one centimetre wide, leads from one side-entrance, through an arch, past the central entrance to the doorway at the other side; the puppets are drawn along this slot by handles worked from below. As this method would allow of very few figures on the stage at once, and keep them in one line, there are side-tracks like railway sidings, which allow one figure to move sideways, so as to let another pass. In our illustration the Angel makes the announcement from the top of the heavenly gallery—which is built just like the gallery running round a Russian farm-house. Then Herod would appear below and take his seat on the throne that stands ready; his suite would turn aside to the left and take the seats placed there, so as to let the Messenger or the Mother and the Child pass, etc. The movement is always from the entrance on the left to the exit on the right,<sup>2</sup> in the direction that the eye generally follows. Probably this movement arises from the motion of the eyes in reading and of the hand in writing: it has had a real significance in the theatre in all ages.

Without wishing to overestimate the importance of this puppet theatre, we must own that it gives us an elaborate model of a stage divided into sections one above another. Much simpler than other known instances of such a construction (especially the English examples), this one does not provide any communication between the two stages on different levels, as this is unnecessary under the circumstances.

Vesselovsky, in his otherwise excellent description of the oldest Russian form of the stage, does not know of this example; he describes, though not very clearly, a far simpler puppet theatre belonging to the Dutch puppet-showmen (*Kluchten*) in Russia.<sup>3</sup> But the model we are considering, which became known long after Vesselovsky wrote, is astonishingly like a description which he quotes, written by one Abraham, who accompanied the Metropolitan of Moscow to the Council of Florence (1437), and stopped on the way at Lübeck, where he was greatly impressed by a religious puppet-show.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately we know nothing of the construction of the stage on which the Tsar Alexei Mikhailovitch's German Theatre gave its memorable opening performance on October 17, 1672; but since the creation of such a theatre meant the triumph of Western, and especially of German, influence, the form of the stage must have been borrowed

<sup>1</sup> The Alexander Bakrushin Museum.

<sup>2</sup> That is, the entrance on the left of the *audience*, not of the *actor*. In English technique these directions are reversed.

<sup>3</sup> Vesselovsky, *German Influence on the Old Russian Theatre, 1672-1716: A Contribution to the History of Culture*, Introduction (Prague, 1876).

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

from abroad, like the puppet theatre. The plays were certainly German; all the pieces by the Pastor Grigori found their way into German schools at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and reached Russia about half a century later. Esther, Barlaam and Josaphat, and Joseph were the earliest subjects; the first was a stock theme of school plays in the West, the second derived from the Italian *rappresentazioni*,<sup>1</sup> the third being a standing subject of the Russian theatre down to our own times. But the most interesting piece is the great *Procès du Paradis*; here we find a mystery-play reaching the Moscow stage long after its Western production; the interval between the performances in Western Europe and in Russia was much the same as we have noticed in the case of the earlier mysteries. The amount of dramatic material imported from the West was enormous. Only a few years later the English comedians reached Moscow with their *répertoire*, and the Clown, the original "Merry Andrew," was naturalized in a Russian adaptation as "Susakim." Thus Marlowe came to Russia before Molière, who made his entry under the next Tsar Feodor (no great lover of the theatre), with his *Médecin malgré lui*, which has enjoyed an almost uninterrupted popularity in Russia ever since.

It is not the aim of this study to describe the great influx of foreign ideas under Peter the Great. The motley troupes of the Moscow 'German Quarter' were now replaced by regularly organized touring companies. The long list of these is a record of growing cosmopolitanism, distinguished by such names as Kunst, Mann, and Furst, and lastly by the memorable but unlucky tour of "Die Neuberin" (1740-41), continued after her retirement by her leading actor, Ackermann.

Not only Germans, but Dutch (who had been popular before) and even Czechs were engaged. These companies had an extremely varied repertory, in which Jack Pudding jostles Molière (in the collection *Histrion Gallicus*) and Hans Sachs (Hekastus, in Macropedius' collection) is found cheek by jowl with Everyman, this last being due to the influence of a prince of the Church at Tobolsk, who happened also to be a patron of the stage. At the same time, also, just as in the case of the mysteries already alluded to, this piece passed into native Russian poetry in the religious dramas of Dmitri Rostovsky, in the form of *The Penitent Sinner*, which marks the farthest point in the Eastward progress of the Everyman theme.<sup>2</sup>

We can scarcely wonder that at this period, suddenly, though again half a century after its first appearance in the West, the elaborate allegorical drama of the Jesuits made its entry into Russia.

These facts are so plain that it is hardly necessary to point out their bearing on our theories. In Germany theatrical touring companies were a social and even an economic necessity for the theatre—a fact regrettable in itself, but subsequently justified by the way in which these companies trained great actors. In Russia touring companies had to be artificially created at great

<sup>1</sup> It is also the subject of a poem by Bernardino Pulci (Florence, 1558).

<sup>2</sup> Veselovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 61. Rostovsky's version is entirely allegorical. The Man is in the Sinner's dress, and good and evil spirits strive for his soul. As the former prevail one piece of his clothing after another falls off, leaving him in the white shirt of a penitent. See the characteristic remarks of the Metropolitan of Tobolsk

expense; the only explanation is that there existed a vast demand for theatrical entertainment, which had to be satisfied by a corresponding supply of foreign dramas. The extreme susceptibility of a Russian audience to dramatic performances is one of the central facts in the history of the Russian theatre. As the Russians had no dramatic literature, no theatre of their own, everything theatrical was new to them. We may note that Ackermann's company, which trained those great actors, Schröder and Ekhof, toured in Russia for no less than five years, with a repertory including the plays of Racine and Corneille, Holberg and Goldoni, and, toward the end of the time, Lessing's early pieces—and this happened full in the face of a national anti-foreign movement, which had found voice even under Peter the Great. It is characteristic of Russian thought that it seems to live by the alternate attraction and repulsion of foreign ideas.

### CONTEMPORARY RECORDS OF PAGEANTS

Another proof of the extent of foreign influence in Russia can be drawn from a branch of art which has always been intimately connected with the theatre—we mean the pageant.

No one has yet disputed the view that the history of pageants and festival-shows is really a part of the history of the theatre.<sup>1</sup> From the time of the Empress Anne, herself a lover of the theatre, there has come down to us a remarkable *Book of the Pageant*,<sup>2</sup> which clearly affords the best criterion for determining how much of this aristocratic art of pageantry, then at its height all over Europe, was native, and how much borrowed from abroad. It is well known that in France and Austria, in spite of the exclusively Italian origin of the pageant, and in spite of the Italian pageant-masters, a completely national style was developed; but of this Russian example we may positively say that, did not the architectural setting and certain antique details give us a clue to where the scene is laid, the whole *Book of the Pageant* might have been compiled in any other secondary centre of such displays—Stockholm, Dresden, or Stuttgart. Not even in the costumes—with the sole exception of the dress of the clerics—is there a trace of Russian character. *The Book of the Coronation* displays the complete triumph of Spanish ceremonial, which a closer inspection, shows to be blended in a not uninteresting way with the Orthodox Greek liturgy. But with this exception, all the arrangements of the festival, the processions and banquets, the fireworks and grand stands, even the popular merry-makings, which might (one would think) have shown a trace of national feeling, are in the conventional style of the period. Compared with other European Books of the Pageant, the only other distinctive feature is a certain air of reserve, of a kind not to be found in the West until the end of that century.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gregor, *The Art of the Vienna Stage*, vol. i, pp. 40 et seq. (Vienna, 1924).

<sup>2</sup> *Full Description of the Anointing and Coronation (etc.) of the August Anna Ivanovna (etc.)* (St Petersburg, 1731), Figs. 8, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Gregor, *op. cit.*, note 172.

## ICONS AND ILLUMINATED BOOKS: THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE THEATRE

We now leave the discussion of the influence of foreign ideas and turn to another branch of art that has always ranked as typically national and individual.

It may seem a strange notion to link the theatre with the most characteristic form of native Russian art, *i.e.*, book illumination, which, beginning with the Greek illuminators, has been handed on through the Russian icons down to the later Slavonic examples; yet this idea, from its first formulation, has awakened the interest of specialists,<sup>1</sup> and closer consideration makes it appear less daring to trace a connection between two arts that seem so far apart. I can adduce quite a number of authors in the past who have found it perfectly natural, in dealing with Western nations, to argue from the merely pictorial art of a period to the contemporary theatre;<sup>2</sup> and I trust that I myself have pursued this form of research with some success, particularly as regards miniature painting.<sup>3</sup> To-day it is thought legitimate to draw conclusions from a mosaic of the thirteenth century as to contemporary stage costume,<sup>4</sup> even although we know nothing about the theatre of that period. The objection that might be made to such inferences—that it is impossible to verify them—holds good also in the case of Russia. Our theories must remain theories; we cannot test them by facts, as when we argue from the paintings of the fifteenth century and later ages in Western Europe to the contemporary theatre.

But with these few words of apology we are still at liberty to say that the conceptions, nay, even the formal method in which pictorial art and theatrical art work, must in all cases be the same. If during the centuries from the fifteenth to the eighteenth, as we can now see more fully, thanks to the progress of modern research, a vast treasure of pictorial art was accumulated of which the theatre failed to make any use, preferring to follow foreign methods, it is a fair conclusion that a vast expansion of the theatre was only waiting for an opportunity to manifest itself. This—among many other facts—is an explanation of the rise of the Russian theatre from the end of the nineteenth century onward, a growth that becomes stronger as the fetters of Western form are cast away. This movement toward artistic aspiration and deliverance seems to us more important than even those social and political movements of the period which favoured it.

Painting, in Eastern Christendom, as in the Latin West, sprang from ancient Greek art; but in the East it shook off Greek tradition almost from the start. It never shared that delight in the contemplation of this world that we find in Western art. In the course of a few centuries

<sup>1</sup> The Exhibition of Russian Theatrical Art at the National Library at Vienna, which unfortunately fell through (1927), was intended to illustrate this parallel by exhibiting the two forms of art together. In this connection I have to thank Prof. J. Strzygowsky of Vienna and Prof. O. Wulff of Berlin for many suggestions and interesting details.

<sup>2</sup> I need only mention the researches on stage costume by Böhm, and the book on theatre scenery by Niessen. This subject was copiously discussed during the conference at the Theatrical Exhibition at Magdeburg, especially in Prof. G. Fischer's (Berlin) lectures on Renaissance and *baroque* examples.

<sup>3</sup> Gregor, *The Art of the Vienna Stage*, vol. i, note 20; vol. ii, note 46, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Gregor, *op. cit.*, vol. ii, p. 39.



Western painters had mastered many artistic methods; they passed from mosaic to fresco, from spacious panel pictures back to miniature. Far narrower was the field of Eastern Christian art; it dealt only with the sacred picture, subject to narrow conventions, and the sacred book. Even the choice of subject is limited; it must either be the portrait of a saint, or else represent some simple, quite obvious incident. This limitation required a great economy in the means employed, but called for a profound suggestiveness in the treatment of the subject; the sacred figure is shown simply writing or praying, or, more often, listening to the divine message. The need to make the significance of the picture obvious to every one, led to the accentuation of the folds and wrinkles of the faces—so unlike the harmonious softness of Western art. The colours had to be bright, in order to show up in the dark labyrinths of the cloisters, or in the half-light of the space in front of the icon-screen; we see no soft blending of tints, such as was attempted in Italy at about the same time, but a clash of brilliant colours. Gold was lavishly used to heighten the mystic significance of the picture; this method was abandoned in Italy after the Primitive period, since Nature was found to provide a finer setting. There was no scope for art in the background of the sacred picture; the background was always the monastery, a Byzantine building reared on slender pillars, with the characteristic doorways that appear persistently in the illuminated manuscripts, as they do in the theatre, and with fantastically elongated gilded domes and vaultings (Figs. 36, 134); nature is altogether excluded, or reduced to a minimum.

Greek illumination is the art of saying something familiar with a mystic power that makes it ever new and ever surprising;<sup>1</sup> far more comprehensive and popular, wider in scope, but showing the same rigid austerity of method, was the art of icon-painting,<sup>2</sup> with its gigantic output extending over several centuries. The subject of the icon soon went beyond the single representation of a saint, and included groups of several figures; but the finest examples retain the lonely praying figure, gaunt and without any background, and above it, in one of the upper corners of the picture, hovers the symbolic globe (God, or the Cloud<sup>3</sup>) (Fig. 137). We also find scenes of high dramatic significance, with numerous figures—the Annunciation, in which the spirituality of the two faces is presented with wonderful effectiveness,<sup>4</sup> the

<sup>1</sup> Hans Gerstinger, *Greek Illuminations* (Vienna, 1926). See especially with reference to this subject XX (St John the Evangelist), Supplement 128, 1<sup>b</sup>; XXIII, *Greek History*, 53, 1<sup>b</sup> (Niketas Akominatos); and XXIV, *Greek History*, 53, fol. 1<sup>b</sup> (the Emperor Alexios Mourzouphlos). The work is most valuable for its descriptions and the fine reproductions of the pictures. For the Byzantine side of the subject see J. Ebersolt, *Byzantine Miniature Painting* (Paris, 1926); and for further information N. Kondakov, *History of Byzantine Art* (Paris, 1886). Recently—unfortunately too late for the present research—has appeared *The Russian Icon*, by N. Kondakov translated by Ellis H. Minns (Oxford, 1927).

<sup>2</sup> After F. Halle's excellent work we come to the monumental and splendid publication of O. Wulff and M. Alpatov, *Examples of Icon-painting* (Dresden, 1925). In this book, and for the first time, the authors have succeeded in giving a new and masterly conception of this remote field of art. Unfortunately the reproductions in colour were confined to the examples at Berlin, and colour is a necessary element in the study of Russian art, as the present essay shows.

<sup>3</sup> Several icons in the Ostrukov Museum, Moscow (not in Wulff and Alpatov); the Holy Warrior John, Russian Museum, Petrograd.

<sup>4</sup> In the Sergeiev Troitsky Monastery; Wulff, Plate 45.

Sleep of the Virgin, in which the impression is produced by a few lines<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 133), the Raising of Lazarus,<sup>2</sup> the Transfiguration.<sup>3</sup> It is almost impossible to describe this kind of art; it is the mystical element enclosed in the smallest possible space. In the Transfiguration there is a certain artistic treatment of the background; we see the well-known folds and ridges of rocks and meadows, familiar to us from Byzantine Greek art, rising up in a cubist style, like flights of steps, in accordance with one of the main constructive methods of primitive art (*cf.* Fig. 300). In the centre, above, is Christ in a circular nimbus; two rectangular spaces are reserved, right and left, for Moses and Elijah, and the disciples lie in a triangular space at the foot of the picture. A slight elevation or depression of the figure, within the narrow limits of this form of art, is enough to give the desired effect; the symbolism of space is complete. In the Descent into Hell<sup>4</sup> the circular halo with the figure of Christ is sinking down into the foreground, and the cubist rocks in the background tower up out of sight (actually no more than fifteen small spots of colour, Fig. 42). Right and left, in two sombre groups, are the prophets, the two outside figures depicted kneeling, for the sake of symmetry, and a long black triangular rent in the rock represents the abyss of Hell. It is impossible to give an idea of the abundant themes of this inexhaustible field of art; but merely in order to draw attention to an example that is more abstract in its treatment, we may point to the Assumption of Elijah (Fig. 5), where Heaven is represented by a circle of light with angels round the rim; in the centre of the picture is the fiery wheel (a symbol of the chariot of fire), drawn by slender horses, hardly visible, and below we see the reception of the dead prophet by angels that bend over him, in a typical landscape of rock and forest.

In our treatment of this subject we make no pretension of adding anything new to the methods usually employed by historians of art; our object is merely to prove that the form of this particular art is essentially theatrical in spirit. We see this in the remarkable economy of the composition, which fits exactly into the given surface, just as the stage-picture does into its allotted space; in the extreme devotion to abstract ideas, which can employ footstool and cross, house and tree, halo and cloud, again and again, as the simple ultimates of symbolism; in the gestures of the figures, whether in the quick, convulsive movements of individuals, or the vaguer action of the groups; and, finally, in the colour scheme, also the last word in abstraction, and thereby resembling the colours on the stage, which are never found in nature.

It would seem, moreover, that the illuminated manuscripts of later centuries, down to the eighteenth, were also influenced by the same theatrical spirit. A book, even if religious, was not so narrowly limited by tradition as an icon; it could be more secular, richer in colour—religious mysticism gave place to a freer individual treatment; the illustrated book was more a work of art, a matter of private taste. These causes may have brought about the further growth of

<sup>1</sup> Moscow Historical Museum; Wulff, Plate 61.

<sup>2</sup> Sergiev Troitsky Monastery; Wulff, Plate 68.

<sup>3</sup> Morosov Collection, Moscow; Wulff, Plate 70.

<sup>4</sup> Morosov Collection, Moscow; Wulff, Plate 78.

the Russian theatre was now greatly reduced—*La Serva Padrona* first appeared on the Russian stage in 1742, soon after its original production, while *Maria Stuart*, written in 1801, was performed in Russia in 1810. Catherine II, who followed Lessing in regarding the theatre as the highest school of humanity, might have noted, about the middle of the century, a sort of equilibrium between Russian and French influence; it was the time of Sumarokov's dramatic poetry, and the translations from Molière. Sumarokov's subjects are classical almost in the sense of the *baroque* age; Molière marks the climax and close of the great *baroque* comedy; his *Médecin malgré lui*, which we mentioned as a standing item in the Russian theatre, has been included in the *répertoire* of that theatre from 1764 to the present time. We may note this persistence of particular pieces as characteristic of Russia.

In 1810, long after this method had been adopted in all the important theatres of Europe, a regular list of performances, with dates, was published, much as in the Vienna Court Theatre Almanack.<sup>1</sup>

But this establishment of a Court Theatre, common to the history of all European theatres, includes only a small part of the theatrical activity of the period, though it is the only part that is usually singled out for notice. Far more important was what we may call the unofficial Court Theatre, which, under the name of the Serf Theatre,<sup>2</sup> was unique in Europe. In this institution there prevailed a social despotism that, even in the Middle Ages, never existed in the West; for although in the West actors were soon relegated to a social stratum of their own, yet a great singer or a *prima donna* in the eighteenth century, while belonging to a socially inferior class, could attain the highest honours, and the buffoon of the eighteenth century was not excluded from the Court. But the social despotism of the Serf Theatre came from an unbridgeable gulf between the aristocratic audience and the enslaved actor, though a few more enlightened aristocrats tried to remove this distinction, sometimes even by marrying serfs. What interests us most is that the same separation is shown in the organization of the Serf Theatre, where the auditorium represents the Western, the stage the native, element.

The chief of the Serf Theatres were those belonging to the princely families of Sheremetiev and Yussupov, on their Ostankino estates, often referred to as Archangelskoie.<sup>3</sup> In these we have some perfect examples of the French playhouse of the eighteenth century (Fig. 9); although built of wood, they may be compared with the best secondary French and Italian theatres of their time. Especially striking is the elegance of their rococo style, so far from

<sup>1</sup> Arapov, *op. cit.*, p. 197. This early historian of the theatre had grasped the latest modern doctrine, that no theatrical history is complete without a list of performances, as is clear from his researches on that point (pp. 335 *et seq.*).

<sup>2</sup> See Part I of the present work.

<sup>3</sup> This important subject, in our view the germ of the whole history of the Russian theatre, has not yet been treated. Alexander Bakrushin, in 1927, in an exhibition at the Bakrushin Museum, tried to direct attention to it: *Krepostnoy teatr. Putevoditel po vystavke* (Moscow, 1927), a remarkable collection; we hope that the author may be able to give scientific treatment to the material which he has accumulated with such labour and such intimate knowledge of the subject. There are in existence two sketches, welcome, though short: *Trudi Gosudarstvennoi akademii. Kudobestvennich nauk (teatralnia sektsia)*, and N. P. Kashin, *Teatr N. B. Yussupova* (Moscow, 1927), with an attempt to give a *répertoire*, and a work announced, but not published before the present book was finished: V. Staniukovitch, *Domasnyy Krepostnoy Teatr Sheremetievitch, XVIII veka* (Leningrad, 1927).

the land of its origin, pleasantly diversifying the general character of Russian *château* architecture. But this architectural quality was far less important than the personal contribution of the Serf Theatre; it was the first home of the great Russian actor; it was here that he was discovered, trained, and, finally, passed over to the Court Theatre. We notice what a difference there was between the nursery of great actors in the East and West. In Germany they were chosen from the touring companies; in Russia from the fixed and permanent organization of the theatre. From this centre was developed the natural talent for acting, the innate dramatic faculty of a whole nation—the main element of the Russian theatre.

## Chapter VI

### THE RUSSIAN ACTOR

WE may be allowed here to say a few words on the psychology of the Russian actor, if only tentatively, since our knowledge of the subject, apart from certain well-known classical instances, is not sufficient to cover the general psychology of acting;<sup>1</sup> still, some such reference is indispensable in a study of the Russian theatre.

The Russian actor, like the Italian, feels that he is a part of the people, the expression of the dramatic and creative impulses of his nation; the German actor, on the contrary, expresses his own creative impulse, though he can rise to heights under the stimulus of public applause. The Italian actor depends on the enthusiasm of his audience, the Russian on their sympathy; the German actor could, theoretically, work himself up to his part without any audience, in his own room—a Russian or Italian actor could not. But while the Italian actor is himself creative, the Russian lacks the faculty of improvisation; there is no Russian *commedia dell' arte*, in spite of some recent unsuccessful efforts to found one. The improvisations attempted by Vachtangov and Taïrov are worked out by the producer; they are not momentary inspirations, but, on the contrary, rigidly controlled, and only the remarkable freshness of the acting gives them the effect of free invention; they are related to the *Commedia dell' arte* merely by way of contrast. At this point the lines taken by the Russian and the Italian actor diverge; the Italian actor is swayed by his own temperament, he is the incarnation of the stage, and can improvise a complete theatre, and, if need be, the words of the play, out of his own consciousness. But the Russian actor regards himself as only a part of the theatre; he is utterly devoted to his profession, caring nothing for the world outside; his whole soul is in his work.

We are aware that this is the highest praise that can be given to an actor, but we are persuaded that it is true. To judge of its truth one must have experienced the way in which even great Russian actors subordinate themselves to the theatre taken as a whole—the very point at which the theatre of every other nation often fails; one must have realized with what fervour the lesser actor tries to reach the public, not with any thought of himself, but in order to build up and realize his rendering of his part; and one must have understood the strong faith in the sacredness of their profession that possesses these men, and shows us that in the Russian

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<sup>1</sup> We are glad to see that this subject has attracted the attention of one of the younger Russian writers on the theatre, J. Gurevitch, *Tvorichestvo Aktera* (in the just-quoted papers of the Academy) (Moscow, 1927). He shows a good knowledge of the earlier French literature on the subject, and, in part, of recent German literature. We hope that it is reserved for some longer work to treat the theme with the necessary thoroughness; plainly the numerous theoretical essays on the subject, including the short work just mentioned, must be completed by the study of our sources (autobiographies, letters, criticisms), probably also by experimental study.

theatre we have to do with a phenomenon bordering on the sphere of mysticism. We must give a word of praise to the numberless, nameless actors, far more than the hundred or so that any book could mention, who have really carried on the work of the Russian theatre, especially in the first quarter of this century—carried on the work with hard, self-sacrificing toil, living for rehearsals and performances, caring nothing for salaries and star parts—a mighty army, building up the temple of their art with their own lives.

## THE IMPERIAL THEATRES

Unfortunately it was not till the last decade of the nineteenth century that the publication was started which will always be the chief source of information for the history of the Russian theatre—the *Annals* of the Imperial Theatre,<sup>1</sup> covering all the State Theatres of the two capitals. This book, which for completeness is such as no other city or theatre has ever produced, is only rivalled by a few long works on particular German theatres; and these are isolated instances. The *Annual* is based on the programmes of the theatres, chronicling the activity of five separate houses; there follows a survey of the theatrical year from the artistic standpoint, recognizing to a surprising degree the modern doctrine that theatrical productions cannot be properly recorded except by illustration. The *Annual* ends with the usual biographical notices, expanded into essay form; it runs to five hundred pages. It is an astonishing fact that in years of unusual activity a supplementary volume<sup>2</sup> is issued, as extensive as the first, and especially devoted to history and biography. There are many famous theatres of the great past which could not boast of so extensive a historical record of their whole existence as that which the Russian Imperial Theatre issued of a single year.

We lay more stress on this work, because it is in fact our chief source of information in investigating the period of preparation for the great age of the Russian theatre. If Lunacharsky and the other authors of the work we have quoted (on the Little Theatre at Moscow), which is obviously founded on the *Annals*, had kept to the system of giving the programmes, the question of the mutual relations between the Revolution and the theatre would have been instantly solved—at least for one theatre. We could then have read the changes in the *répertoire* between 1891 and 1914, compared with those between 1914 and 1917, as easily as the figures on a dial, and drawn our conclusions—if there were any to be drawn.

We are naturally most interested in finding out what theatrical style prevailed at the State Theatres during the first ten years covered by the *Annals*, so that we may judge of the relation of the Imperial stage to two great developments of the modern theatre—Stanislavsky's theatre and the Russian Ballet, both of which came into existence during these ten years.

Even at the risk of being too diffuse, we must try to distinguish the critical years of this

<sup>1</sup> *Etsregodnik imperatorskikh teatrov* (St Petersburg, 1892 onward; edited by A. E. Moltchanov).

<sup>2</sup> *Etsregodnik, etc : Prilozhenia Knja*, vol. i (1893-94, edited by A. E. Moltchanov).

period, in order to understand the tendency of Russian theatrical style during the years when the Imperial Theatres set the standard.

We find the repertory, even in the second year of the *Annual*,<sup>1</sup> compiled with extraordinary skill. Just as the modern Russian theatre fills the gaps in the native drama by importing foreign pieces, so the Imperial Theatres played Shakespeare, the German classics, and French and Italian musical pieces—the latter not included in the first *Annual*. We find a *Hamlet* staged in the style of grand opera, with heavy architectural scenery (Fig. 13), much like the German fashion at the beginning of the present century,<sup>2</sup> and next to it an extremely fine and intimate setting of a Tolstoy play.<sup>3</sup> The art of broadening or narrowing, of knowing when to use big, when intimate, effects, is the foundation of the modern Russian system of production. Native authors are represented by Karpov and Bukarin,<sup>4</sup> in a rich and harmonious operatic setting. In opera we have Meyerbeer's *Jan of Leyden* (*Le Prophète*), in an imposing architectural style, such as, about the same time, or, rather, ten years earlier, was associated with the names of Burghart, Rottonara, and Brioschi at Vienna; it is the style that we generally call "the taste of the eighties," a time when the old fixed type of stage setting gave way to something more fanciful, but more formless. In the ballet the strict Italian style of dancing of the middle of the century kept to its traditions; but we think we can recognize a growing subtlety in this art, which answered to the lighter and more fanciful character of the scenery. Heroic opera or classical tragedy was bound to suffer by being produced in a decadent setting; the ballet found it easier to preserve its own buoyant quality.<sup>5</sup>

An increase in the foreign repertory marks the second theatrical year, when the new Russian productions include only a forgotten piece by Sumtchatov, a ballet by Glinka, and *Eugene Onegin* (Fig. 14), with scenery in the delicate post-romantic manner; more salient, by contrast, are those settings which call for the favourite stage-architectural style, such as Björnson's *Mary Queen of Scots*,<sup>6</sup> *Rigoletto*, and an unimportant piece (*Le Comte de Risoor*) by Sardou. It cannot be denied that while some of these productions would pass muster to-day—*Rigoletto*,<sup>7</sup> for instance—others, such as *Carmen*,<sup>8</sup> would have to be 'Russified' in a way that is nowadays quite common on what was once the 'Imperial' stage. This rather drastic editing of a piece is not altogether a discovery of recent times.

Of the period we are now considering the third year is in all respects the most important

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, *Vtorodj god* (1891-92).

<sup>2</sup> Scenery by A. Heltzer, to whom heroic tragic subjects always seemed to appeal. Noteworthy is the strong Gothic feeling, evidently derived from the prevailing Gothic style of the theatre.

<sup>3</sup> There are also pieces by Ibsen and Ostrovsky. Unfortunately there is no play of modern society by the former, which would have enabled us to gauge the difference between Russian and Western productions.

<sup>4</sup> M. A. Bukarin, *On Swab a Night!* The ballet scenery with its wealth of leafage and ornament is by A. Y. Janov (Fig. 12).

<sup>5</sup> The ballet *répertoire* is of course the usual international one, represented by Taglioni's *Sylphides*, a favourite production of St Georges'.

<sup>6</sup> The conventional Gothic scenery is by Lutke-Mayer.

<sup>7</sup> Scenery by Zuccarelli.

<sup>8</sup> Scenery by Letova.

and the centre of artistic interest. Unfortunately the new Russian plays of the year, even one by Turgenev, are of no importance. The repertory includes *William Tell*<sup>1</sup> and *The Maid of Orleans*,<sup>2</sup> both in stately settings that certainly surpass anything to be found at that time in the European theatres, where the decadent style was itself dying out. The design of the cathedral scene at Rheims for *The Maid of Orleans* is typical, and far outdoes any Western example in sublimity. The setting of Verdi's *Falstaff* is not so effective; the style of this great musical drama was too high for a degenerate age. But it is remarkable that Wagner's *Siegfried* appeared at that time on the stage of the Russian Imperial Theatre, in a form which it has kept to the present day in many less important opera-houses. Equally remarkable is the setting of Verdi's *Aida*—undeniably on the grand scale, though allowing the style of ancient Egypt to degenerate into the meaningless ornament of the nineties.<sup>3</sup> We note also Verdi's *Ernani*, and among the ballets the well-known *Coppelia*.<sup>4</sup>

We may add to these an unusually magnificent production of *A Life for the Tsar* during the season of 1895–96,<sup>5</sup> such as might be expected in the Imperial Theatre; a piece by Tolstoy, evidently finely done; then for the following year we find the *Merchant of Venice*,<sup>6</sup> in the same architectural, operatic style as we have remarked in the case of other classical plays—Shakespeare's *Richard III*, *Le Médecin malgré lui*, and, as a specimen of the ballet, the *Puppenfee*,<sup>7</sup> interesting to us from its origin, and still included in the Vienna repertory. The character of the repertory is sufficiently clear from these instances; if we carry our survey further the picture is unchanged. To sum up, the Russian Imperial Theatre displays the well-known style of all Court Theatres at the close of the nineteenth century—at its best in opera, of no great eminence in tragedy, distinguished in prose drama and the ballet. The Russian theatre seems, so to speak, a crucial instance of the slow change in style; it undoubtedly needed renovation in tragedy, though opera, thanks to its music, preserved much the same level as before. The seeds of new tendencies were germinating in prose drama and the ballet. If we glance at some of the settings given here (Fig. 19, etc.) we shall notice how startlingly modern they look, at any rate in their complete contrast to the antiquated form of the 'classical' play.

This observation is confirmed if, from the State Theatres included in our general survey, we select the Little Theatre at Moscow, and study the account given of it in the work by

<sup>1</sup> Scenery by Janov. We regard him as one of the most original of this talented group of painters, who seem, as with us, to hold to Italian traditions.

<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly the best work of Heltzer, mentioned above.

<sup>3</sup> Scenery by Ivanov. We notice the abundance of talent among the scenic artists of this theatre, evidently no recent development.

<sup>4</sup> Much Russatized. Swanchild is an Italian ballerina, but Franz is a regular Russian peasant lad.

<sup>5</sup> We have here—a rare instance—the reproduction of a play-bill. It is strange that in spite of the craving for illustration theatre posters are generally left unnoticed. All the more valuable to us is the bill of a piece played in 1818 at the Imperial Theatre of Moscow (National Library), with contemporary announcements of the pieces at the Russian and German theatres.

<sup>6</sup> Scenery by Janov, showing an operatic Venice in the Gothic manner. This style seems to have found favour with all the other European theatres.

<sup>7</sup> Notice the doubtful taste of the groups representing Tyrolean girls. However, the ballet is expressly modelled on the Vienna production by Hasseiter and Gaul.



Lunacharsky and others. This book also mentions Sardou's *Comte de Risoor* (1892), already alluded to, *Don Carlos* (1893) (Fig. 21), and lastly, as a contrast, the *Poor Bride* of Ostrovsky, concluding with Popov's report on the development of the style of production in the Little Theatre, resulting in greater simplicity and clearness, as was shown in the fine scenery of *Le Malade Imaginaire* (1910). If we also consider the vast resources of talent possessed by this theatre—and in this connection we must remember Yushin's name—we stand amazed at the regular, orderly course of its development. And if, as Russians are fond of doing, we take the *Government Inspector* as the standard of theatrical activity, and consider its production on the stage of the Little Theatre in 1924, we can sum it up briefly thus: it was an excellent dramatic production, but showed not a sign of the great movement that was agitating the Russian theatre generally. The development of the Little Theatre is more like that of the German stage, more natural and gradual; it is a deliberate evolution, not the result of an irresistible craving for change.

### THE STANISLAVSKY THEATRE

We now come to a far more important section of our subject. We have quoted the *Annals* down to 1896; it is needless to go further, for in that year Stanislavsky staged *Othello* for the Society for Art and Literature. Two years later began the activity of the Art Theatre, still the most influential theatre in Russia, with the production of *Tsar Feodor*.<sup>1</sup> Both these productions have been recorded for our study in prompt-books and in pictures—an excellent method of the Russian stage (Fig. 25, cf. Fig. 11)—and we can thus judge of them with more confidence than of the performances at the State Theatres.

We cannot at first trace any great change in the style of production. In the scenery, indeed, there is an evident effort in both these pieces (*Othello* and *Tsar Feodor*) to simplify the setting, to get rid of everything that does not belong to the story, that does not play its part; mere accessories are discarded, in order to get into touch with the audience. *Othello* was mostly played in simple street scenes, *Tsar Feodor* in front of plain flats and arches, such as the scene-painters of the Court Theatre would never have passed. Still, the difference is not important; we can only feel the beginnings of a change in style. It is when we turn to the prompt-book of *Tsar Feodor* that we find written evidence of the new tendency. Stanislavsky's prompt-book

<sup>1</sup> A great deal has been written about this theatre, though mostly in stray articles published in many languages. In Russia there appeared recently in the journal *Rampa i Zhizn* the first part of a historical sketch, which Nikolai Efros developed into a brilliant monograph—*Moskovsky Khudozhestvenny Teatr (Moscow Art Theatre), 1898-1923* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1924)—though he very unfortunately omits to give a list of the repertory. This work is the best authority for the origin of the modern style in the Russian theatre. The same period is covered by the autobiographical study *My Life in Art*, by C. Stanislavsky (translated by J. J. Robbins; London, 1924). But the best history of the Art Theatre is contained, not in any book, but in the wonderful collection of the M. C. H. A. T. (Russian initials of the Moscow Art Theatre) Museum at Moscow. This museum proves how greatly a historical record of performances in prompt-books, autographs, play-bills, and pictures adds to their value. The directors of the museum, with the help of Stanislavsky himself, have allowed me to use Fig. 80, etc., for the present work.

introduced a method that was new to the Russian theatre. The whole action of the play is made to develop out of the original conception, whether as a spectacle or as a drama. The descriptions of the scenery are also stage-directions; the complete picture is there in the brief sketch. The method is the same as that of the miniature painters who pictured the vast visions of the Apocalypse on a single page of a book.

This intensity of conception, this power of visualising stage effects—joined, in the case of the great stage manager, with the power of translating conception into action—lies at the root of Stanislavsky's art. For the first time the Russian theatre was brought into line with modern Western art. Stanislavsky's method is that of Brahm and Reinhardt; though the idea of making the prompt-book "the full score of the performance" was not discovered by Reinhardt, but dates back to the Vienna Burg Theatre, where Laube's stage-directions, even in the nineties, were elaborately minute.

The progress made by Stanislavsky is nowhere more evident than in his treatment of what has always and everywhere been a favourite subject for drama—the Antique. The State Theatre, of course, often produced plays of which the scene was laid in the ancient world (*cf.* Fig. 18); for instance, there is the *Gladiator of Ravenna*, in Heltzer's setting, which appears in the *Annuaire* for 1895; but there is nothing really ancient about the piece—the taste of the period softened down its 'antique' character into a drawing-room style that had lost all distinction. Only eight years (1903) after the *Gladiator of Ravenna* Stanislavsky staged *Julius Caesar* in his theatre. The setting by V. A. Simov (Fig. 28) was starkly definite, and showed a mastery of antique form doubly remarkable in Russia; the scene extended across the whole width of the stage, its horizontal lines coming out finely; it was a scenic masterpiece, and appeared before Reinhardt's settings of *Oedipus* and *Lysistrata*. Katchalov's name has been associated with the production of *Julius Caesar* from his masterly acting in the chief part, but the main interest lies in the greatness with which the whole production was planned.

From this time onward followed a series of great productions, like successive monuments, *Gore ot uma* (Griboïedov),<sup>1</sup> *L'Oiseau Bleu*, and Ibsen's *Brand* (1906); the choice of these pieces is bold, modern, and made from a thoroughly artistic standpoint. If we glance for a moment at that standard piece of the Russian theatre, Gogol's *Government Inspector* (1908), we can recognize a genial humour that brings out all the weak points of the phase of life that is caricatured; but in the well-known crowded final scene (Fig. 29) there is a hint of symbolical treatment,

<sup>1</sup> This work was made the subject of the first great book of a production (as was done later with Vachtangov's production of *Tarandor*)—Nemurovitch-Danchenko, *Gore ot uma, v postanovke moskovskogo Khudozhestvennogo teatra* (State edition, Moscow, 1923). Besides the text of Griboïedov's play, the critic has given a history of its origin, and a study of the production. This idea of making a master-production the occasion for an edition of a play is not absolutely new; it was followed by Max Reinhardt in his *Classics of the German Theatre*, with the difference that in Reinhardt's editions only illustrations were included, while the Russian book gives the whole plan of the production. What a help it would be to us if the master-productions of the German stage, such as, for instance, the second part of *Faust*, produced by Schlenker, Thumig, and Max Reinhardt, had given rise to such a publication! The book of *Gore ot uma*, which contains an excellent analysis of Stanislavsky's method of producing a piece, is also most valuable for the scenic designs by M. Dobujinsky. The co-operation of literary and pictorial art in the staging of a piece is clearly shown (Fig. 26).

such as was brought out more fully in the latest version of the play, of which we shall speak later.

In 1909 we have Andreïev's *Anathema*, staged altogether in the cold but attractive style of modern English art (Fig. 27). In 1910 comes Turgeniev's *A Month in the Country*, with as profound an insight into the environment of the play as was shown in the case of Gogol's comedy. In the same year came the astounding experiment of *The Brothers Karamazov* (which almost worked a revolution on the German stage after the War), and a *Hamlet* far in advance of the time in the style of the costumes and scenery—we must remember how the piece was played only a few years before at the Court Theatre—in 1911 we have *The Living Corpses*, Molière (*Le Malade Imaginaire*), and Ibsen (*Peer Gynt*). Later on come Goldoni, a new Dostoïevsky experiment (*Nikolai Stavrogin*), and more recently Tolstoy's *Tsar Feodor*.

We can realize from this varied repertory, where Molière comes next to Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, the wide range of Stanislavsky's theatre—it seeks to include the whole of dramatic literature, yet its main impulse is Russian. To both these aims Stanislavsky has always remained true, and it is this balance between Russian and foreign drama that has given his theatre such importance in the eyes of Europe—nay, of the whole world. These two aims could only be attained by new methods—by his system of Studios, and by touring companies.

The system of Studios is, in its origin, nothing more than an attempt to ensure that a piece shall never be performed till it has been properly rehearsed. In the German theatre this is an ideal never to be attained; and the history of the German stage in recent years has proved that the frequent changes in repertory leave far too little time for rehearsal. The Russian theatre has the enviable distinction of awakening a wider public interest than any Western stage can command; the run of a piece is far longer,<sup>1</sup> consequently more time can be given to rehearsing its successor—and time means opportunity for work. Though the original conception of the staging of a piece is an inspiration that can be quickly translated into fact, its treatment from an intellectual or literary standpoint is a very different matter; a Russian theatre is a *collective* body, and all its members have to co-operate in the rehearsals of a single piece, and the translation of intellectual and literary values into appropriate form takes far longer, as experience shows, than the mere visual presentation of a play.

Stanislavsky's method is unique in the history of the theatre. He started with the conception of a single piece or class of pieces, and developed from it the conception of a single theatre. That one piece should create a theatre for itself, should be sufficient to keep that theatre alive, and should begin and end its career there is no new idea; there is something of this idea in all dramatic festivals, from the *Dionysia* to Bayreuth, or in a touring company which performs only one play; but for a permanent modern theatre to devote itself (theoretically) to

<sup>1</sup> We see from the records of big theatres holding large audiences, such as the Kamerny, or Mayerhold's Theatre, that no more than two new productions are needed in a year. Hence the first production has almost the importance of a festival performance, as in the ancient theatre.

a single piece, or, as we see in Stanislavsky's Studio system, to classify plays according to their character, and give each section its own theatre<sup>1</sup>—even its own actual stage—is a most interesting innovation.

It is gratifying to Germans to see that this method is like the production of *Hamlet* described in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, in its creation of the theatre out of the play—or, more accurately, out of the community of the actors. The development of the theatre from the play is more noteworthy when the author is himself a skilled manager, as in the case of Shakespeare, Molière, and many author-managers of popular theatres and touring companies, such as Rademin, Joseph von Kurz, and others.

Owing to the development of this system of Studios, Stanislavsky's theatre is worth studying, not only in itself, but in its offshoots, regarded as separate theatres. This view seems justified, if we look at the four Studios (besides an Opera Studio) now in existence:

1. A Studio for classical comedy (Shakespeare) and modern character pieces.
2. A Studio for drama and comedy (still surviving as a separate theatre).
3. Vachtangov's Studio (*Turandot*) (still running after Vachtangov's death).
4. A Studio for drama (still surviving as a separate theatre).

These have continued in existence, No. 3 even after the death of its manager (Vachtangov). Efros,<sup>2</sup> however, does not quite agree in considering these Studio theatres as offshoots of the Stanislavsky theatre, but regards them as being still merely schools of acting—which they certainly were originally, but not afterward.

This far-reaching and ever-growing organization was not enough for Stanislavsky's genius; he also established a system of touring companies. These tours, which gradually extended as far as America,<sup>3</sup> began three years after the conclusion of peace, and showed the Western nations the significance of Stanislavsky's theatre. Each country welcomed the Russian companies for those qualities that appealed particularly to its own national taste. In Germany, for instance, it was thought that the 'naturalism' of the nineties had revived again, though the later form of the critical catchword was 'naturalistic realism.' But it seems as if the enthusiastic reception of the tours in Germany was due far more to the sincere and temperamental performance of the Russian actors, who were new to the German public, than to any question of their 'style.' Such art had never been heard of in human memory; hence it was supposed to be nature—an excusable mistake; but to realize how far it fell short of the truth one

<sup>1</sup> Here again we seem to have an echo of the past. In the eighteenth century we find the collected repertoires of theatres, often printed, giving the selection of dramatic literature performed at a particular theatre (the latest and perhaps the finest is Schikaneder's Library, in the *Catalogue of the Theatrical Collection in the National Library at Vienna*, vol. i (Vienna, 1927)). In this case, however, the theatre is dealing with dramatic literature generally, while the Russian method aims rather at giving a complete rendering of an individual piece.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 395, etc. The author agrees with us in rejecting the catchword of a 'system.'

<sup>3</sup> We may also mention that the Russian players sometimes found a more or less permanent home abroad, at Paris, under Pinolev's management, and at Prague.

would have to go to Russia and see Stanislavsky's methods of rehearsal, the way in which he made his actors work together, the elaborate care which he took to get every speech, every syllable, absolutely right. The error of the German critics is a proof of the little attention generally given to 'style' in acting.

In 'style' we may say that Stanislavsky resembles Brahm rather than Reinhardt; but we can hardly speak of any single definite style when discussing a theatre so varied in its activities, and the source of so many other theatres—*i.e.*, the Studios.<sup>1</sup>

We have spoken of Stanislavsky's work in eliciting all the harmonies of a language so full of character and so musical as the Russian; but this is only one side of a manager's task—he has to appeal to the eye as well as to the ear; we must now discuss the question of scenery and stage-setting, a topic on which too little stress has been laid in all the manifold criticisms of Stanislavsky's theatre. It seems to us that here we have our best chance of solving the problem of his 'style.' All great reformers of the theatre have sought for the scenic artist fitted to collaborate with them; some, like Richard Wagner, sought without success; others, like Mahler and Max Reinhardt (with Alfred Roller), were more fortunate. Stanislavsky, too, looked around for a colleague to supplement his own art—he found him in another great reformer of the modern stage, Edward Gordon Craig—a fact which alone should be enough to dispel the widespread impression that his is a 'naturalistic' theatre. Besides Craig and the older V. A. Simov (in *Brand* and *Julius Caesar*), two other artists, now at the height of their profession, Benois and Dobujinsky, have worked for Stanislavsky's theatre; these seem to us to summarize and display its style more clearly than could be done by any discussion.

The art of M. Dobujinsky (Figs. 57, 68, etc.) is as far removed from French Impressionism as Stanislavsky himself is from Brahm. Dobujinsky sees the stage and its business with a quiet, impartial eye—from him we need expect no sensational shadows, no startling lights; the painter's aim is to harmonize persons and things, walls and hangings, as subtly and faultlessly as the producer brings out and combines the effect of the dialogue. And yet, without any striving for effect, the objects that the painter visualizes so quietly and dispassionately—we might even say realistically—take on a significance far beyond what they represent, when seen on the stage. This is Dobujinsky's finest achievement, as it is also Stanislavsky's. For instance, the masquerade in *The Queen of Spades* becomes a Dance of Death, in which arches and columns, all the architecture of the scene, seem to droop over the delirious groups of dancers, like funeral banners. In *Die Räuber* Franz Moor stalks along a gallery (Fig. 74) where the reflections in the polished floor give an effect as if the solid ground had failed beneath his feet—an illusion

<sup>1</sup> The general impression of a performance at Stanislavsky's theatre is one of remarkably harmonious dialogue, without the exaggerated pathos common in the Russian theatre; there is an extremely subtle alternation of action and repose, even in *ensemble* scenes; of all the Russian theatres, this one is most akin to our own. We refer especially to the latest production of *The Time of the Turbini* (Bulgakov), played with great effect by the younger actors (Fig. 32). The piece treats of the fate of a family of White Guards (the Tsarist party in the Revolution), and shows sympathy for that party, though it would be too much to call the play counter-Revolutionary. The dialogue is good, and emphasized by the striking personality of the actors.

that suggests the grisly thought of swinging on the gallows. And the quiet blue and green room in *A Month in the Country*<sup>1</sup> is pleasant yet enervating, a solitude that weighs on the heart—full of peaceful charm, yet with a sense of brooding fate.

Anyone who studies these pictures carefully will realize one of the greatest achievements of the Russian theatre, the discovery of stage symbolism. This symbolism is of no fixed type, such as we unfortunately sometimes meet in the German theatre; it is new born with each play. Symbolism is inseparable from the theatre; the ermine robe of the player makes him a king, and the ragged coat a beggar. In our study of the Russian theatre we shall discuss the different forms taken by symbolism, from the symbolic form and colour of the icon right down to the symbolic movement of Mayerhold's scenery. We shall see that the manifold catchwords that critics are so fond of applying to the Russian theatre, Realism, Constructivism, Bio-mechanism, and the rest, are generally superfluous; the fundamental facts are far simpler.

The same conclusion can be drawn from the work of the other painter, originally associated with Stanislavsky, but destined, unfortunately, to do his best work for the Grand Opera at Paris—we mean Alexandre Benois.<sup>2</sup> Just as Stanislavsky moulded the characters in *The Brothers Karamazov* into living, unforgettable persons—incurring the unjust charge of 'realism'—so Benois sees to the very heart of the figures that he sketches. He analyses forehead and eyes, nose and hand, even coat and trousers, down to the least fold or frill of a costume (Figs. 61, 69, etc.). But he can also analyse the world of colour; he is the finest colourist that the Russian theatre—or perhaps any theatre—has ever produced. Let us consider the wonderful colour effect in *La Dame aux Camélias* (Fig. 70, etc.)—those reflections in the floor and the walls, the light coming in at the window and contrasting with that of the lamp—let us appreciate the illimitable emptiness that is mirrored in the parquet floor of the boarding-house in *The Idiot* (Fig. 67). Or, again, let us look at the complete realization of the wintry light in the *Forest Prison*, the dusty, turbulent atmosphere of the *Club des Cordeliers* (Fig. 64), and we shall own that there is absolutely nothing on the German stage to match this infinitely subtle world of colour. Anyone who likes may call this art 'Impressionism,' but he must not forget that it is art for the theatre; the colder light here, the warmer light there, are not put in merely for the sake of the picture, but for the sake of some action, some destiny that is fulfilling itself in and through these effects. We can hardly go wrong in regarding this 'relative symbolism,' arising naturally from speech, gesture, and colour, and yet expressing all the heights and depths of human destiny, as one of the main foundations of Stanislavsky's art.

<sup>1</sup> Various forms of this design are in the possession of the Tretyakov Gallery at Moscow, the National Library at Vienna, and the wife of the painter (Fig. 73).

<sup>2</sup> For a fine description of this artist's work for the Russian stage see Stanislavsky, *op. cit.*, p. 332, etc. For Dobujinsky see p. 345.

## Chapter VII

### THE BALLET

BY his connection with Benois,<sup>1</sup> Stanislavsky's art is linked with another group which may be described as the greatest of all, both from the width of its range, and from the fact that of all the phases and movements of the Russian theatre it has enjoyed the greatest popularity. Here again we have to consider a widespread movement, a message from Russia to the European world, that has met with a unanimous welcome which cannot be questioned—we refer to the *Russian Ballet*, which has a clear right to the central position in our work, for its influence radiates in all directions, touching classical tragedy on the one hand and the variety stage on the other. It is not easy to over-estimate the artistic importance of a form that has survived all other experiments of the earlier Russian theatre. We have already mentioned how charmingly the Ballet stands out from the uninspiring and obsolete traditions of the Imperial Theatre; but it would have succumbed to the torpor that threatens the great and famous ballet companies of Europe at present, had not its exodus to France at the beginning of the present century brought it into touch with a phase of art then in the full vigour of growth, the art of French Impressionism. At the same time it pleased fortune to endow the Russian Ballet with a whole series of fine executive artists; names like Nijinsky and Fokin, Pavlova, Karsavina, Ida Rubinstein, stand out from the ruck of mere dancers—they are great artistic personalities; and, to crown all, the art of the ballet attracted a painter of genius, in whose eye drama translated itself into dance, and dance into the bright colours of living sketches. This painter, before whose magic world we stand amazed, unable to grasp it, was Léon Bakst.

#### LÉON BAKST AND HIS SYMBOLISM

There is no other artist of the Russian school about whom we know so much as about Léon Bakst.<sup>2</sup> He is dead, and his wonderful career, with the record of his creative work, ever

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<sup>1</sup> In the Russian theatre.

<sup>2</sup> See the programmes of the Châtelet Theatre, the centre of the Russian Ballet, which appeared in collected form, in the first numbers of *Comoedia* (an illustrated journal), and the programmes of Russian Ballets and festival performances, 1909-21. *The Russian Ballet in Western Europe* (London, 1921) dealt with the same period. A. Svetlov's work, *Le Ballet contemporain*, in collaboration with Bakst, published at Paris, 1912, gives the best account of the work of the company as a whole, and of the individual artists. Then began a series of monographs, all with generally successful reproductions of pictures—André Levinson, *Bakst, the Story of the Artist's Life* (London, 1923), and before this, though less detailed, A. Alexandre, *L'Art décoratif de Léon Bakst*. Bakst's posthumous works were edited by L. Réau, D. Roche, V. Svetlov, and A. Tessier: *Unpublished Works of Bakst* (New York, 1927). Part of the

renewing itself like a force of Nature, ever conjuring up newer and more marvellous forms, now lies before us complete and finished; the whole of Bakst's work has been reproduced, and his genius is constantly being discussed in fresh monographs. We ourselves in another work<sup>1</sup> have unhesitatingly placed Bakst by the side of the greatest costume designers of all times, such as Burnacini, or Bertoli—he is the most brilliant exponent of the great revival in the art of costume in our day. Besides his eminence in this respect, we must consider his place in the history of the stage, which is no small one in the case of such an artist. Bakst stands out from the other French Impressionists with the independence of genius. No doubt his delicate fantasy of tint, his ardour in reflecting the world in colour, would have been impossible without Manet and Renoir, and especially without Cézanne; much the same may be said, in another field of art, of the development of Dérain and Matisse, and especially of Picasso. But Bakst's unique greatness lies in the fact that he chose to be a theatrical artist, a designer of costume, neither more nor less; he was true to his vocation as a painter, but he specialized in his art, and, even within his self-imposed limitations, achieved an overwhelming success.<sup>2</sup> The theatre repaid this devotion by inspiring him with its own values, and helping his work to ripen to its supreme perfection. The stage as Bakst sees it is an open, deep, pictured space, sufficiently ample to hold the magic world of the ballet. We see the specifically theatrical quality of the master when we compare him with two others to whom he is akin. To A. Golovin, the older of the two, the stage is an Impressionist picture (Fig. 49, etc.); it has not yet acquired the quality of space; to K. Korovin, the younger, though he is one of the greatest masters of subtle impressionistic stage effects, the stage is subordinate to the picture, robbed of all solidity, reduced to an exhibition of the painter's art (Fig. 75, etc.). But with Bakst we never forget the theatre. He unfolds an enchanted world of light, vistas of shining pillars, the depths of the Indian jungle, twilight backgrounds, a visionary glimmer of silk, gold, flowers, and jewels—but all these things belong to the theatre, and have their share in the piece. Nowhere do we see scenery for the sake of scenery, as on the stage of the nineties—we feel that everything is animated by the spirit of the enchanted world before us.

The range of Bakst's subjects is far wider than that of the ordinary ballet. His favourite theme is the Antique, for which he, soon after the nineties, found out the first and only independent style that the Russian theatre has ever achieved. His *Après-midi d'un Faune* (Fig. 86) has all the poetry of ancient legend, and is as full of colour as is possible in an antique subject. *Daphnis et Chloë* (Fig. 87) goes back far into the pastoral world of the Golden Age; *Narcissus* expresses the weariness of Roman civilization; Cleopatra shows us the dusky tints, the brooding figures, of the East. But the marvellous *Hélène de Sparte* (Fig. 83) brings all Hellas before our eyes—as some have seen it in vision, but never before on the stage. His preference for the atmosphere

same material is used by C. Einstein, *Léon Bakst* (Berlin, 1927). A fine edition of one of his best works is A. Levinson, *Designs of Léon Bakst for "The Sleeping Princess"* (London, 1923).

<sup>1</sup> Gregor, *Viennese Scene Art* (Vienna, 1925), vol. II, p. 120, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Alexandre, *op. cit.*, p. 68, etc.



time, and afterward, the other great Russian theatrical artists that we have mentioned loved to dally with despair, to call up sad visions. Yet—it is hardly believable—all these solemn artists have at one time or other gone in for comedy and caricature. For instance, Dobujinsky translated into scenery a cruel caricature of *La Traviata* (Fig. 68), a series of Russian everyday scenes, and a fairy-tale by Andersen for performance in the theatre. Even the grave Benois' costume figures sometimes reach a pitch of drollery that makes them fit for the variety stage, preferably in some French *chanson* of the Second Empire. A genius in this kind of work, hitherto unknown to us, seems to be B. Shukaïev (Fig. 185, etc.), who, in addition to settings of *Carmen*, *The Queen of Spades*, and *Eugene Onegin*, has also done some very effective designs for the *Chauve-Souris*. In his work the same simplification, the same avoidance of subtle effects of lighting, the same compression of the scenery into heavier, harder but more expressive forms, are turned to comic, or preferably grotesque, uses. This is the case even when serious Russian subjects have to be treated, as in the *Legende* (Fig. 45), or when the romantic aspect of Nature passes into tragic gloom, as in the scene of *The King called for his Drummer*.

This art of designing a single scene as the frame for a short song of a few catching verses, instead of an elaborate dramatic setting, is exemplified in the unique cabaret company of the *Oiseau Bleu*, founded by an entertainer of real genius, remarkable for his genial humour and polyglot wit—N. Yushny. The *Oiseau Bleu* is a post-War institution; it is the most popular of them all, and has made Europe acquainted with some, at least, of the qualities of the Russian theatre; it has met with no opposition, for it has never pretended to be more than it is, a delightful entertainment, absolutely inoffensive; and it has had the remarkable good fortune to secure the exclusive services of excellent artists. It is the transition period from Bakst to the present day, embodied in permanent form; it has a love for dressing its amusing scenes in 'period'—rococo, or the Petersburg 'Empire.' Its method of representation is Impressionism, often intentionally childish; sandwiched between fine scenic inspirations in the light vein of grotesque and caricature, we find innocent puerilities, talking heads, or other objects coming out of painted bodies, corks and cushions that come to life. This cabaret company has toured with no fewer than seventy-one of these 'turns,' through numberless cities, and has won enthusiastic praise from connoisseurs. This is largely due to the way in which this Cabaret Theatre intentionally and skilfully keeps itself apart from all other theatres, but in part, also, to its rather sentimental insistence on its Russian origin.

Perhaps its success is due least of all to the feature that chiefly interests us here, the extraordinary skill and versatile talents of its scenic artists. Of these Khudiakov<sup>1</sup> represents the national element, Tchelishev the international and historical style (Fig. 184), Poshedaïev the fantastic and legendary spirit (Fig. 91). All these designers have a quality that consciously

<sup>1</sup> He is the originator of the *Volga Boatmen*, the sketch which, in conjunction with the song which Chaliapin contrives to make so tragic, captured all Europe. It is a version of a picture by Repin, but the first conception of the theme by Makovsky, used by the *Oiseau Bleu*, is published here for the first time (Fig. 187).

goes back to the primitive traditions of their race. But this quality is far more evident in M. Urvanzov, one of the most imaginative young artists that the Russian theatre has ever produced. His range of fancy almost reminds us of Bakst; sometimes a prodigal, it strays through enchanted forests, or among the domes of Nijny-Novgorod; sometimes it sternly summons all its powers to shape an austere symbolical stage-setting from the sombre colours and gold ground of the icon (Fig. 189).

Besides possessing these remarkable artists, who, we hope, will not always be bound down to a minor theatre, the *Oiseau Bleu* company has contrived to assimilate foreign elements so as almost to make them Russian. It is a pleasant task to try to distinguish the Russian and German elements of Ernest Stern's design in Fig. 182.

## Chapter VIII

### THE IMPULSE TOWARD THE THEATRE

THIS power of assimilating foreign elements shows what strides the Russian theatre had made toward internationalism with these minor but widely spread ramifications. Their appearance abroad was, in a sense, the counterpart of the former foreign theatrical tours in Russia, except for the fact that the activity of the Russian Ballet and the *Oiseau Bleu* was comprised within the first quarter of the present century, and more especially within the eventful years after the War, when the taste for anything Russian was so much keener. But even in that short period the Russian reaction against foreign influence, which had persisted during the whole nineteenth century, was bound to revive; the brilliant Impressionism of Bakst was sure to arouse opposition. It was felt that a limit must be set in Russia to this inordinate delight in visible form, this magic of tone, this deluge of ballet. And here we must touch on a principle that, in our Preface, we professed to leave outside the scope of our survey—we mean the complete change in social conditions, which makes the Russian theatre at home a very different conception from the Russian theatre abroad. The theatre means far more in Russia than in any other country of the world, because it embraces a far greater, if not the greatest, part of the whole intellectual life of the nation. The theatre in Russia, since 1917, has meant the escape from the actual world into the world of fancy, a sort of compensation for so many losses—religion, private life, love as an individual passion, all sorts of personal experiences, engulfed by the tyranny of Collectivism. Under this pressure all the unsatisfied feelings of life take refuge in the theatre, and that is a reason—but not the only one—for the enormous influence of the theatre on Russia of to-day. The intoxicating power of living free in the world of fancy lures thousands every evening into the theatre, after they have plodded through a day of collective life. This may be called the *negative* influence that has shaped the life of the modern Russian theatre. But there is also a *positive* influence. Collective ideas can nowhere be so fully proclaimed as on the stage; the desired effect of a sudden explosive revolution in thought can nowhere be so readily presented as in the stage world, freed, as it is, from the laws of real life. The fortunate combination of these two forces, the negative need for a safety-valve, and the positive desire for propaganda, was bound, theoretically and practically, to cause the extraordinary growth of the Russian theatre of to-day. The longing speedily to attain a new type of life, as far as possible away from tradition, from history, from the society of yesterday—where can this be more readily satisfied than in the theatre? Only on the film, perhaps, which is free from the physical limitations of the older art. When the film-producer Eisenstein once declared, “What

is the Grail to us—just a bit of Spanish pottery!” we can hear in his speech, beneath the puerile claim to ignore a thousand years of the past, an expression of that desire to find out new motives, new materials, new symbols, which makes Russian thought of to-day interesting alike to friend and foe.

So we come back again into the field of our philosophical inquiry. Where could it be easier to abridge the long and laborious road to the discovery of new theatrical symbols than in the country which in a moment had shaken off all trammels in the attempt to attain a new type of humanity? The example of the Russian Ballet shows us into what varied forms the historical development of a movement can gradually branch out, without really altering its fundamental principles; it is one of the most interesting achievements of the modern Russian theatre to have shown how this slow process can be compressed into ten or at most twenty years.

We should remember that pictorial art has also gone through the same experience in the rush of new thoughts and feelings.<sup>1</sup> The whole creative work of Kandinsky, the oldest and most mature artist of the present day, presents a similar analysis, in the higher sphere of pure art.<sup>2</sup> Kandinsky's earlier works show no trace of the new movement; they are, like his woodcuts, strongly marked by the national Russian character that we recognize in the theatre. But this artist is a sheer radical; the new sense of artistic values meant, for him, so complete a deliverance from rules that only the simplest elements of his art, like the first letters and syllables of a poem, were left. In his present method the elements of painting, spots of colour, circles, lines, are put together and thrown on the paper as an impromptu (Fig. 301), often with a very delicate colour effect—no chance impression, as an observer can see even from a distance, but always controlled by an inner necessity.

It is as useless to argue over this form of art, as over a few bars by Scriabin or Ravel. Either a real form, an effective symbol, has been discovered, which impresses the beholder with the same force as the music does the hearer, or picture and music are alike futile. All that we need note in this connection is the swift and radical change in art and music, which, as we shall show, had an exact parallel in the theatre. Fortunately, the vehemence of the change did not obscure the course of its development; there was no passionate renunciation of art, as a whole, and we shall find it possible to follow out the phases of the new movement.

### THE 'EMANCIPATED' THEATRE

Alexander Tairov deserves the credit of having been the first to feel the necessity of re-creating the theatre from its very foundations. He expressed this view in literary form,<sup>3</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> As to Russia, the best survey is in C. Einstein's, *The Art of the Twentieth Century* (Berlin, 1926), pp. 160 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> H. Zehder, *Wassili Kandinsky* (based on his autobiography) (Dresden, 1926).

<sup>3</sup> A. Tairov, *The Emancipated Theatre* (Potsdam, 1923; new edition 1927). The book—a lively controversy with Mayerhold—is by far the best known work on the modern Russian theatre. We may also mention three works, which, up to the present, have given the most comprehensive studies of the modern Russian theatre: Alexandre Bakshy, *The Path of the Modern Russian Stage* (London, 1916),

also far more fully in a noble series of stage-settings in his Kamerny Theatre, that give the impression of a continuous development. He has not shaken off all relations with Western Europe, which is fortunate from our point of view, since he was the first to transmit the impression of the 'New' Russian theatre to Europe by means of touring companies; we cannot but admire his strength of purpose in thus quietly presenting his new methods to the world for comparison with the old, without making the least concession to foreign ideas. This individuality makes Tairov's theatre, even when compared with Stanislavsky's great model, the one that—at least in its inception—offers the most perfect example for study. Let us now inquire how far Tairov imitated Kandinsky's artistic radicalism, or how far his principles, and the material with which he worked, are responsible for his choice of other methods and other aims.

Tairov's central idea is the return to the main, primary elements of the art of acting. The actor produces an effect on his audience, not only by speech and gesture, but by his entire personality; consequently he ought not to be set in a scene, a setting with wings and backcloth, in which he has his own little allotted space; he needs the whole stage, in all its height and depth. This consideration has led Tairov to rediscover the three-dimensional stage, following a tendency that had been general over Europe for some ten years.<sup>1</sup> He treats the stage as one complete space, doing away with all conventional ornaments or stage devices, such as wings and backcloths, and breaking the flat stage floor up into a set of different levels, rising like a flight of stairs to the roof; and he wants—a most interesting point—a return to a conventional style of speech and acting, after the 'natural' elocution of the naturalistic theatre.<sup>2</sup>

We notice here that he calls for no disintegration of the theatre, but, on the contrary, for a better, closer, union of its elements. His elaborately exact system of rehearsals proved that the title of his famous book was a paradox—the actor is far more 'enslaved' than on a stage of the old type, when he finds himself in a scene, every detail of which is framed for that particular play—so that he is required to look strictly to every step, in order to bring out the proper effect of the scene and his own action. Look at our Fig. 219, a sketch for the *Merchant of Venice* by Alexandra Exter, an artist closely connected with Tairov's theatre from the start. It is a stage-setting formed of Venetian motives—bridges, stairs, mooring-piles, water, stone, air, lamps, or moons—but these motives are not arranged in the usual 'natural' way. The combination

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which works out ably the fundamental types of the Russian theatre; O. M. Saylor, *The Russian Theatre* (London, 1923); and H. Carter, *The New Theatre and Cinema of Soviet Russia* (London, 1924); the last work is remarkable for giving numerous dates of performance of plays, which, in the absence of regular programmes, are most valuable. With the main theme of the book, that the Russian theatre is the offspring of the Revolution, we cannot, of course, agree; Carter leaves out of consideration the whole period of preparation down to 1917, which we regard as indispensable to an understanding of the history of the theatre; he has altered his views, however, in his excellent book, *The New Spirit in the European Theatre* (London, 1925).

<sup>1</sup> Those who think these changes in the treatment of the Russian stage too violent and sudden should remember that about the beginning of the present century the form of the stage had been materially altered by the so-called 'relief' settings and the revival of the Shakespearean stage in Germany. Since then there has been a persistent effort to revive the three-dimensional stage. See Gregor, *Vietnamese Semic Art*, vol. 1, pp. 122 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Tairov, first edition, p. 55.

is absolutely new, yet gives the conception of Venice completely; less striking than an impromptu of Kandinsky's, the design is more intelligible. *Tamira, the Lute-player*, a piece in the ancient style, for which Exter had previously designed the scenery (Fig. 192), is simpler and more comprehensible. A short flight of stairs stretching across the whole width of the stage provides for a difference in level, while Cyclopean ruins, and pylons of tapering pyramid shape succeed perfectly in giving an impression of antiquity. This setting, in which the lute-player makes the dead stone live, is most striking. *Salomé* gave rise to a setting more in the spirit of the *Merchant of Venice* scenery, from which we can gather more readily the principles of the new style (Fig. 222). The stage is irregular; it goes up stairwise, then stretches level on the left to the well that is Jochanaan's dungeon, on the right to the Tetrarch's seat. It is closed in on one side by red columns, on the other by black hangings—we notice the obvious attempt at symbolism—and the background is blue, shot across by jagged white streaks, like flashes of lightning. The significant arrangement of the scenery, and the skilful varying of the stage levels add greatly to the impression of space. In this scene, however, the performers were set as in a picture, quite in the old manner, as our Fig. 194 shows. But a further considerable step toward spatial effect in the theatre is shown in the perfectly 'open' design by Madame Exter, reproduced here in the original colours ("Constructivist Setting for a Tragedy," Fig. 218). The scene breaks away from all tradition; its colouring is a harmony in black and red—and we have only to imagine it filled with a procession of actors to be sure of its striking effect. Unlike the sketch for the *Merchant of Venice*, and in our opinion more successful, is *Romeo and Juliet*, by the same artist; here the stage forms are all free, without recalling any known associations. The prologue, splendidly staged, with a continual passing of figures, is played on a stage broken up into short flights of steps; the balcony scene is played on a built-up scene, like a carved casket; as with the scenery in the ancient icons, it is unlike anything actual.<sup>1</sup>

A. Vesnin, another artist closely connected with Tairov's Kamerny Theatre, seems to us to have taken another great step toward the desired spatial effect of the theatre. His *Phèdre* scene is built up of simple inclined planes (Fig. 202, etc.); even stairs are not employed, so as not to cramp the space by the mechanical succession of steps. It is surprising, especially with the help of the lighting, to notice how much the scenery gains in spatial effect by this treatment of coloured planes—between several blue patches one of bright yellow is suddenly introduced, and so on—although this is only the old peepshow trick; the finely designed costumes, with their hard, flat folds, exactly suit the scene.

Vesnin and Tairov then staged Chesterton's wild satire, *The Man who was Thursday*, and used for it a regular scaffolding (Fig. 207), which, reversing Exter's method, was employed

<sup>1</sup> The sketch for *Othello*, by the same artist (Fig. 195), does not seem to us so successful, for here the motives employed are more ambiguous, and do not allow us to be sure of their meaning. Characteristic of A. Exter's artistic development is the difference between the sketches shown in Figs. 192 and 194, made ten years apart. Fig. 196 shows the extreme point to which it is possible to go in staging a piece originally limited by its style and history.

for humorous effect. Lifts came up, an illuminated sign helped to turn part of the scene into a bar; the effect of this open-air theatre set on an ordinary stage was perfect.

With the assistance of Ferdinandov and his scenery for *Adrienne Lecouvreur* (Fig. 210), Taïrov went in for 'period' plays; with Yakulov, one of the most brilliant artists of the Moscow theatre of to-day (Fig. 216, etc.), he turned his attention to light opera. This new phase may seem surprising, but is not really so; it was a natural counterpart of the 'pathetic' solemn style that the new method required for serious drama. When every movement of the actor had to be exactly prescribed, in order to take the right position on the varying levels of the stage—a few inches' difference might 'queer' the business of the others—a broad, pathetic, dignified style of acting was necessary to disguise the real lack of freedom in the 'Emancipated Theatre.' As a natural consequence of this, from the sublime to the ridiculous was but a step; the extraordinary precision of the stage management made it possible, in the case of one of the old comic operas, in which Taïrov delighted, to translate the finest shades of music into movement and comic gesture and make the 'pathetic' actors into comedians. By this method really masterly productions were given of a light opera, carefully thought out, and raised to the level of a caricature of life in general. Such was *Giroflé Giroflà*, and, later, Lecocq's *Le Jour et la Nuit* (Fig. 209). The pathetic style was employed in O'Neill's *Desire under the Elms*, a striking drama of passion, made doubly interesting on a stage on which spatial analysis was developed into a kind of synchronism. The whole of the house, in which the action took place, was erected on the stage, so that while a scene was still in progress, one could see the characters of the next scene coming in; the effects of the second scene could be seen while the action of the third was passing, and so on.<sup>1</sup> Taïrov has also included ancient classical drama in his *répertoire*, presenting Werfel's *Trojan Women*.

From the theoretical point of view we cannot deny that Taïrov's theatre has sought for a new form of the stage, and has, in fact, found it; by dispensing with the old proportions, and abandoning all traditional devices, he has done everything that is possible to bring out spatial values. If we consider Fig. 212 we shall realize how scenery can be made to give the effect of space, we might say, of solidity. All that in other methods of staging was given by graphic symbolism, the symbolism of the picture, is replaced in this case by spatial symbolism. Instead of wings and backcloths, instead of the flats and arches of the old system, we have permanent sections of scenery, coloured or lit, curved or plane surfaces, symbolizing space. This effect is enhanced in an extraordinary degree by the skilful lighting—the best on the Russian stage. Taïrov's solution of the problem undoubtedly offers a new method, worthy of our investigation.

It is not surprising that scenic art should have developed in this direction. We must remember that nearly all the older types of the theatre, down to the eighteenth century, and, chief

<sup>1</sup> This experiment is akin to the simultaneous theatre of the Middle Ages, in which, on separate parts of the stage, simultaneous and independent scenes might be going on at once. This has been tried lately in the German theatre by Piscator.

of all, the Shakespearean theatre, have aimed at spatial symbolism. This was generally on a modest scale, contenting itself with a recurrent division either into upper and lower stages, or into front and back stages. All the typical forms of the earlier *baroque* age, Serlio's and later on Rasser's and Lettner's stages, are solutions of the space problem, in which permanent sections of the stage represented permanent spatial values. Again, Shakespeare's upper stage represents all possible elevations (balconies, windows, perhaps even hills); the back of the stage represented all possible recesses (the inside of a tent, alcoves for a throne or a bed), and so on. If we trace this method further back it becomes so primitive that space is suggested merely by doors on which names were written, denoting the houses of the various characters (as in the plays of Terence). The difference between Tairov's stage and these earlier methods lies in the fact that the modern form of stage promises to find a new solution for every variety of scenic setting,<sup>1</sup> while the older type remained the same for all.

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<sup>1</sup> Of course this promise is illusory. As long as the stage occupies the space of a cube or parallelepiped, from which one face is removed, every point in it has its settled spatial value, corresponding to its position within the whole figure; 'up centre' will thus be always more effective than 'off left,' and so on. It is quite intelligible that the movement for greater effect in the theatre attacks the traditional form of the stage, and would wish to increase its spatial values, that is, free it from its limits of space. By taking away the side walls the stage space, which was confined within rectangular limits, becomes free, or only bounded by rear walls. Thus the sense of space is increased from one open side to three (see later our remarks on Mayerhold), but this apparent increase in the means of representation involves difficulties in bringing out the literary side of the theatre. These difficulties are increased by a stage that is free on all sides, a so-called open-air theatre. The limitations of the open-air theatre, as shown by theory and experience, are treated by the author of this work in his *Monuments of the Theatre*, ii (Munich, 1924), "Introduction."



## Chapter IX

### THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF SPATIAL SYMBOLISM: THE ARCHITECTURAL STAGE

**A** MOST interesting proof of the truth of this comparison between new and old is afforded by the later work of Tairov's own scenic artists, especially when dealing with lofty themes. We see them then, of their own accord, going back in a surprising fashion to the methods of the *baroque* theatre, just as the primitive devices of the sixteenth century gave way eventually to the deep stage of the *baroque* opera, and of the Jesuit Theatre. So the *Rienzi* setting, by that fine artist Yakulov (Fig. 295, also 269 and 274), is nothing else than an architectural design of Piranesi, translated from a drawing in perspective into the modern style of flat surfaces.<sup>1</sup> In the sketches for the *Œdipus Rex* we find ourselves in a later period of stage architecture, about 1830. This method is most interesting when studied in Rabinovitch's fine sketches. From mere suggestion of flat surfaces (*Truth is Good, but Luck is Better*, also *The Government Inspector*, Figs. 320, 288) we come to fragmentary pieces of architecture (*Lysistrata*, Art Theatre, Fig. 319), and from thence to big built-up architectural scenes, which cannot disguise their likeness to the *baroque* theatre, and the deep stage with its long avenues running right back (*Ælitta*, Film Scene, Fig. 290).<sup>2</sup>

In this almost incredible way the Russian theatre blossomed out into grand architectural scenes, quite in the style of the eighteenth century, except that the latter employed painted views of architectural details, while the former built them up in solid form; but the system of space-symbolism, expressing itself in a semblance of architecture, is identical in both. A good example is Fedorovsky's *Lohengrin* (Fig. 287), which, to one who is familiar with scenic architecture on the grand scale, is not so strange as it might seem at a first glance, or his *Carmen* (Fig. 286), brilliantly successful, and still nearer to the old style of operatic scenery. Then there is Amosov's *Julius Cæsar*, an attempt to use the big built-up scaffolding of Exter and Vesnin for serious ends (Fig. 280); and, above all, important stage-settings, with an exuberance of detail, like Fomina's *Faust* and *Galilei* (Figs. 294, 284, also 223). Samoshevadov's *Mysteria-Bouffes* too (Fig. 278), an attempt to combine a circular stage with one that goes up in steps,

<sup>1</sup> This is a repetition of the method of the *baroque* theatre, elaborating architectural details, stairs, bridges, pillars, passages, till the whole stage is covered with them, in order to bring out the spatial value of every point.

<sup>2</sup> Even the three entrances of the *baroque* theatre came in again, with the long avenues leading from them, as first introduced in Palladio's stage, and then adopted during the seventeenth century. This persistence of architectural motives in scenery—a compulsory consequence, as theory and experience prove, of the architecture of the stage itself—soon made itself felt in the Russian theatre, all the more because Russian stage architecture is really built up, while the architecture of the *baroque* stage, though obvious enough, was merely painted on wings and backcloth, and came under the laws of painting.

shows the same tendency. The same difficulties that stood in the way of Tairov's 'pathetic' style, which eventually becomes a weariness, appear also in the case of his 'symbolic' stage; the separate sections to which a symbolic meaning is attached become too prominent and command too much attention, just as in the *baroque* theatre the superabundance of architectural effects threatened to swamp the dramatic interest of the play.

### SIMPLIFICATION (REACTION) IN SPACE-SYMBOLISM:

E. VACHTANGOV

Even on the Russian stage the need for a simpler means of expression made itself felt at times. It seems as if the examples of the simple and lofty artistic style, which was an invariable characteristic of ancient painting, were always bound to come to the front again. Here we may refer particularly to Tairov's setting for Ostrovsky's *The Storm*, one of the most impressive of his productions. The piece was played on and under a simple sloping path of boards,<sup>1</sup> which stretched across the stage from right to left, ending on one side in a stair, on the other in some arches. The architectural scheme was as simple as possible, the symbolism merely in the germ, so to speak, but the affecting incidents of the play were brought out all the more forcibly. We have seen, and still see, a whole series of young artists busy working out this theatrical principle, sometimes on the side of space-representation, sometimes from the literary and phonetic standpoint. Among them is one of the most thoughtful theatrical artists of Young Russia, M. Andreïenko, who understands how to give his scenic constructions an impressiveness that in spite of their simplicity—the scenery is made up of a few plane or rounded elements—is singularly strong. Let us consider the spirit of stern aspiration so powerfully expressed in Fig. 296, the heroic and pathetic effect of which can hardly be denied, and then contrast it with the warm, passionate feeling of the setting in Fig. 297. In both cases the materials used are of the slightest; the source of this surprising power lies in the sureness with which the material is used, the knowledge of the significance of every detail, and a wonderful talent for bringing that significance out on the stage. Here we hail the discovery of a new element, a new principle for which Kandinsky, and many of the most enthusiastic and eminent of the new Expressionists, had long been seeking.

To the same category belong the simple but speaking scenes that B. Matrunin has devised for *Eugene Onegin* (with a hint of period in this case), *The Taming of the Shrew* and, lastly, the simplest and most successful, a fresh setting of *The Storm*, in the Chaliapin Studio (Figs. 241, 245, 293, etc.). The simplification of the means employed could hardly go farther; at the same time this very restraint seems to denote a profound feeling for the stage, and a devotion to it for its own sake which almost eludes definition.

<sup>1</sup> On a stage where the floor is constructed not of level surfaces, but of inclined planes, entrances generally take place not on the level, but on a sort of rising slope or 'ramp.'

E. Vachtangov, one of the greatest of the series of great stage managers that the young Russian theatre has produced, was without doubt an active and enthusiastic inquirer into the hidden sources of theatrical effect. His name is linked with Stanislavsky's Studio No. 3, and thus his earlier training rejected the 'pathetic' style of the conventional theatre for the natural speech and so-called 'naturalism' of Stanislavsky. But his early production of *The Spider*, the model of which is preserved in the Moscow Theatre Museum (Fig. 309), shows clearly that the young stage manager aimed at producing a symbolical effect by the shortest and most direct way. The entire action is confined within the limits of a simple, artless symbol, a spider's web, quite in the manner of the primitive sacred pictures. Vachtangov took too short a cut to reach the desired symbolic effect; but that his long, laborious progress was along the right road is shown in the later production that in a sense was his life-work, *Turandot*, which most completely satisfies the definition we have already given of the art of the Studios. Gozzi's *Turandot* in Vachtangov's version has not only created a theatre, it has been up to the present nearly the only piece in the repertory of that theatre; it has, in a tragic sense, been the work of his life; lastly, as we are glad to see, it has been published in a magnificent edition.<sup>1</sup>

Vachtangov's piece was the first serious attempt to reconcile the young Russian theatre with the theatre of the past. In spite of the persistence in following new principles which is a part of any new movement, this revival of the past was bound to come in the long run, for every great school of theatrical art has attempted it. Hitherto—with the sole exception of Stanislavsky—Russian theatrical art had evaded the historical problem; history, in the greatest examples of Tairov's and even Bakst's productions, was nothing more than a pleasant memory, a mere ornament. Vachtangov grappled with the hardest part of the problem, for it is far easier to transfer the medieval atmosphere of dramas about kings, or the Renaissance style of classical comedies, to the modern stage than to reproduce a definite historical entity of the highest importance, the *commedia dell' arte*.

Vachtangov, too, evidently aimed at spatial symbolism. His symbol in the setting by Nivinsky (Fig. 314) is a slim fantastic pillar, among a set of inclined surfaces, that allow of varying effects on all sides, far more attractive than can be obtained on the flat stage floor. If we allow for the breaks in level we can clearly distinguish the division into front and back, lower and upper, stage. The latter, representing a house, a gallery, or a gateway, is visible on the left of the twisted pillar.

The whole architecture of the scene has a profound 'cellular' character; it is like the submarine scaffolding of a coral reef, that needs to be filled with life. The effect of the lighting and the changing action gives a variety to the symbolic architectural setting, as does also the striking originality of treatment. Vachtangov traced the life of the *commedia dell' arte* from its very beginning, just as he built up his 'cellular' scenery. The characters first enter in ordi-

<sup>1</sup> *Princess Turandot. Teatralno-tragicheskaja skazka v 5 akten* (tragi-comedy in five acts) (Moscow, Petrograd). Text with introduction and illustrations and music, but unfortunately without the stage-directions of the prompt-book. See Fig. 310, etc.

nary walking dress (Fig. 310, etc.), and change in full sight of the audience, so that there is always a glimpse of coat or gown visible under the droll Chinese robes; then they play the piece with all seriousness, till the quartette of the four comic characters, which allows the Russian, a natural comedian, to shine in his own special fashion. We notice the manifold overlapping of the historical and the modern style; while the story of the play—without irony—displays the pathos of the Russian stage, the scenes and costumes are, of course, quite devoid of pathos; and Truffaldino and Pantaloon—ironically—act like Russian comedians, though they wear the traditional dress of the Italian comedy of 1750.

This difficult experiment, owing to the skill of the producer and the enthusiasm of his performers, met with complete success. It is the only case in which the modern theatre has succeeded, if only partially, in solving the problem of the impromptu theatre, which has always been its aim. The mastery of the difficult text of the play, the marking of every shade of expression, every step and every gesture—with that minute accuracy of rehearsal which we mentioned—is so complete that the beholder is persuaded, by an absolute but intelligible paradox, that what he sees is all invented on the spur of the moment (*cf.* p. 45). But what interests us most in this connection is the surprising and successful return to an old form of the stage, that could hardly be avoided when the greatest economy of means was to be combined with the greatest effect of stage architecture. Vachtangov's stage is—if we disregard the frequent breaks in its level—the stage of Shakespeare.<sup>1</sup> We cannot fail to see a proof of the creative force of the new theatre in this sudden but successful return to ancient methods.

### LESSER THEATRES IN THE VACHTANGOV TRADITION

This is the place to speak of some lesser theatres, which, like the Jewish Habima, owe much to the influence of Vachtangov. These theatres, also, produce their effects with an almost incredible economy of means; the stage generally appears as a platform with a few coloured screens or flats on it, thus going much farther back into the past than Vachtangov had done. But although the scenic resources are few, there is in the performance a power of expression that reaches the utmost height of the actor's art, embodying itself in suggestive form. The most complicated stage business is rehearsed with wonderful industry, worked out with microscopical minuteness, and lastly performed in a sort of ecstasy. Of course subjects that deal with religion or passion play a great part here, as they always do in the Jewish theatre—a theatre that can rely upon great natural talent, and an even greater power of fascination. One

<sup>1</sup> If we imagine Nivinsky's setting made symmetrical in shape, by moving the twisted pillar to the right, the two doorways, one over the other, the upper one with a projecting platform, will come on the centre of the scene. Thus we get the upper stage with its gallery, characteristic of the Shakespearean theatre, and the covered stage at the back for scenes played farther 'up stage,' or in interiors. It is a pleasant study thus to be able to disengage from modern stage-settings the ancient types, which are usually obscured by the modern devices of the irregular stage floor and the unsymmetrical form of the scenery. These echoes of old methods arise not from conscious imitation, but through a fresh discovery of their great effect in the theatre.

of these subjects is *The Dybbuk*, a piece of no great value, which tells of a passion so strong as to defy the world, religion, humanity itself (Fig. 324, etc.). As is common on the Jewish stage, the most serious scenes are freely interspersed with grotesque interludes and even dances; not only this exceptional play, which obviously aims at reviving the connection between the theatre and religion, but the most prosaic performances of the Jewish public Kamerny Theatre, follow similar methods.

Vachtangov's symbolism, as the very nature of his masterpiece demanded, had its early ironical side. Like all who have a genius for the theatre, he wavered between pathos and irony, and perhaps failed in his attempt to achieve the impossible by combining the two categories. In his methods the Gothic reaction triumphs over the conventional illusions of the 'architectural' theatre. How far his example has been followed along the lines of travesty, in the smaller comedy theatres and variety shows, can hardly be described. As a typical example we may quote the latest novelty at the Jewish Kamerny Theatre, *Trouadec* (Fig. 323). In its scanty setting, consisting of a few suggestions of stage properties and some coloured paste-board flats, and in its noisy action, continually interrupted by song and dance—the subject is the highly compromising experiences of a French Academician on the Riviera—it approaches the irony of Aristophanes.

### MAYERHOLD

The theatre of V. E. Mayerhold, undoubtedly the most significant of all modern Russian and possibly European theatres, has its ironical side too. Mayerhold's effort to go back to the first elements of the theatre is more energetic than that of his rivals; if Tairov reverted to the *baroque* theatre, and Vachtangov to Shakespeare's theatre, Mayerhold takes us into the field of Greek classical drama and mime. He carries the principle of the 'open theatre' as far as it can possibly go; in his view Tairov has done no more than abolish the wings. Mayerhold plays a piece without any curtain, in front of the bare walls of the building. We must not, however, suppose that this involves any neglect of the different space-values that the stage affords; the exit space is generally a circular or oblong orchestra (*Bubus the Teacher*, *The Mandate*, *The Government Inspector*) with a wall at the back (in the first case a fence of poles, in the other two a series of polished planes). By this arrangement it is possible to give the actors more space, and make them visible from different sides. In fact, the pictures given in this work (Figs. 356, 358, 360, etc.) enable us to realize the plastic effect of the figures and groups, than which nothing finer has ever been achieved. If only the bare walls of the building are used (*The Forest*, *The Restive Earth*, *Tarelkin's Death*, *The Red Dawn*) a built-up construction on the stage saves the spatial values from being lost. Sometimes this built-up scene slopes upward from the proscenium high above the stage floor (*The Forest*, Fig. 355), or practicable scaffoldings are erected (*The Restive Earth*, Fig. 342, etc.), on which scenes can be played. In each case care is taken to leave

no section of the empty stage space unemployed, or without its part in the play. Another important point is that the 'constructivist' settings employed by Mayerhold—contrary to the instances we have mentioned before—are not fixed, but mobile. The whole of the tumbledown scenery in *Tarelkin's Death* is movable (Fig. 338, etc.), the machinery in *The Magnificent Cuckold* can be set going, and in *The Government Inspector* the whole inclined floor of one scene appears several times on the stage, and disappears again. There are movable walls (*D. E.*, Fig. 344, etc.), and screens that are really swing doors; and the employment of all sorts of vehicles is frequent. Apart from the extraordinary mobility and gymnastic agility of his actors, who are always in full view of the audience, the very scenery is moving; the whole theatre is astir, as if afraid of being at rest for a moment.

It is impossible to suppose that this method is only the work of chance, or aims merely at cheap sensation—this view is disproved by the extraordinarily powerful effect produced, and by the absolute sincerity of the producer; his aim is nothing less than to get his effects, not by stage pictures or general tone, not by speech or stage-lighting, but by movement, or what might be called motor-symbolism. In Mayerhold's theatre, for instance, the feeling of evening is conveyed, not by the usual changes in lighting, but by strings of tired workmen going home from the factory, and the feeling of morning by the steady march of a confident and expectant chorus—both these effects were actually introduced in the performance of Verhaeren's *Red Dawn*. This choric expression is the necessary complement of the dancing and gymnastic movement of the actors; if their dancing is borrowed from the ancient Mime their singing reproduces one of the long-lost effects of the Greek Chorus (*cf.* the three Figs. 348-350).

It will be worth while to discuss a complete production by Mayerhold in detail, in order to explain how he employs his methods, and what effects he produces. We will choose a play which we have more than once mentioned as a standard example of the Russian stage, the *Government Inspector*, and go through it, analysing it with reference to the methods just mentioned, and showing how they successively come under the observation of the audience (Fig. 364, etc.).

Mayerhold stages *The Government Inspector* in front of the background we spoke of, set with brightly polished doors. The lights take the place of the curtain, which has been abolished; after the audible signal for the beginning of the piece comes the lighting up of the projectors, usually in full view,<sup>1</sup> and the small inclined plane that we see in Fig. 368 appears, pushed in on trollies—this is found to be sufficient for all 'interior' scenes. A few articles of furniture, chests, an easy chair, a footstool, give the effect of a room of the proper period. The extraordinary narrowness of this scene (Fig. 365) is an obvious spatial symbol; the narrow-mindedness of the *milieu* finds in the cramped scene a form of expression, artless, certainly, but

<sup>1</sup> The abandonment of stage illusion involves showing these scenic devices openly. Of course this abandonment of illusion must be understood relatively; illusion remains in the case of stage costume and various stage properties. Certainly, however, the aim of the theatre to attain the strongest dramatic illusion with the greatest economy of the means of material illusion is more fully realized here than elsewhere.

one which appeals to the masses. However, the producer seizes every opportunity of getting away from this small scene to the usual full stage-setting; the first of these opportunities is the return of Klestakov (after lunch), which is played in an open-air set, across the whole width of the stage, with a chain barrier pushed on for this scene. On one side of the barrier the sham Inspector, and on the other his faithful hangers-on, are seen in continual motion, to and fro, up and down. The feeling of the scene depends on this element of motion. In the same setting, constantly alternating with the narrow interior scene—an especially effective change—the episode of the abandonment of the inquiry, and the expulsion of the petitioners, is acted with a broad effect of continual movement. Lastly comes the bribery scene, with the spectral effect of many doors (Fig. 369) at which figures appear, with outstretched hands full of bank-notes. From this scene onward Mayerhold translates the piece into the sphere of pathology, thus providing a finale in accordance with the author's intentions. After the final speech of the Chief of Police to the audience the characters of the play, hand in hand, in a long string, whirl down from the stage into the auditorium and rush wildly through the whole theatre, till the audience at last realize that they have disappeared; and on the stage is left a row of wax figures, fallen, lifeless, but in the same costume and attitudes as the actors.

We cannot deny that the symbolism concealed in this production, which our readers can now trace step by step—a symbolism of picture, space, and movement—is very artless, and bears no comparison with the fine optical and acoustic symbolism of one of Stanislavsky's productions; still, it is effective, especially on an audience drawn from the masses, and is theatrically right. The symbolism of the ancient theatre too was artless;<sup>1</sup> its intention was to interest an audience counted by thousands, to whom anything but a plain, objective action would have been unintelligible. Artless and mobile, again, is the symbolism of the 'simultaneous' stage action of the Middle Ages, in which the play goes on in constant movement in a street scene, with the houses invested with a certain modest symbolism of their own—the house of Caiaphas, the scene of the crowning with thorns, and so on.

These few remarks must suffice to indicate the progressive analysis presented by Mayerhold's Theatre. With the suppression of the closed stage came the necessity of looking for other categories of symbols, which, as history tells us, were found effective in an age when the three-sided stage was unknown. Mayerhold's return to Mime, a characteristic form of the Hellenistic age, has often been noticed; it is only one more step back to the dances and movements of the Chorus, another feature of the classical age. Again, the built-up scenery of the stage is movable—in contrast to Tairov's fixed stage constructions—so as to leave no 'dead

<sup>1</sup> In this respect the learned researches of H. Bulle, first communicated in a lecture at the Conference at Magdeburg, 1927, ought soon to increase our knowledge of the ancient theatre. The lecturer had made a special study of the way in which Æschylus's plays were staged in the Theatre of Dionysus at Athens. *Prometheus Bound* was represented by a lay figure on the stage, behind which the actor spoke. Other characters came up to him, and the Chorus of the Oceanides was on the proscenium below. A practicable chariot was sometimes employed (*Agamemnon*), and also a crane (called by the comic poets in jest "the tragedian's finger"), which was worked 'off left' to support the machinery for aerial flight or appearances of the gods.

point,' and allow of the furthest possible use of the space. The structures also 'are simpler, wheels, slopes, circles, gratings, interrupted flights of stairs, in order to emphasize their symbolical, fleeting character, and never to allow the construction to cramp the free movement of the scene. The permanent spatial symbol, in fact, was considered a danger, and was discarded, in complete antithesis to Tairov's method; the enclosed stage, the peepshow box, after a vogue of more than four hundred years, was replaced by the 'open' theatre.

### THE PROGRESS OF ANALYSIS

After Mayerhold we may imagine a further analysis, but scarcely a more intellectual insight into the principles he has adopted. Shestakov made a fine design for *Spartacus* at the Moscow Revolutionary Theatre (Fig. 330), in which the spacious pyramidal form, visible from all sides, is applied to the stage. This theatre prefers to use abbreviations of scenery, expressing houses, factories, and so on, by a few indications such as stairs, platforms, telephone-boxes, and lifts, the symbol instead of the whole. There is free communication throughout the whole structure, so that, according to the business of the play, scenes can appear successively or side by side on the separate section of the scaffolding.<sup>1</sup> It would, however, be a mistake to credit the style of the Revolutionary Theatre with any special progress in theatrical art; this stage, which is at present occupied by untrained actors—the sort of men who rose to fame as mob orators in 1917—is a popular theatre of a simple order, with the favourite low comedian, the comic old man, and so forth, while, as might be supposed, the usual subject is the dramatized defence of the aims and incidents of the Revolution.

In the matter of the open stage and the symbolic economy of the *décor*, Leningrad has gone further than Moscow. An example of the circular stage which allows a view of the actors from all sides—an experiment often tried, but never quite successfully—was used in the Leningrad Experimental Theatre for *The Undivine Comedy* (Fig. 227), performed almost entirely in pantomime, as is natural on a stage of this shape.<sup>2</sup> Other types of the Bolshevik stage (Fig. 230) look more familiar, and traces appear of the influence of German and other foreign so-called 'expressionistic' styles of scenery.<sup>3</sup> There is a cubist example in the ballet scene (Fig. 273). It is hardly necessary to mention that the method of the Mime, inaugurated by Mayerhold, is eagerly followed: we may notice the performances of the Proletarian Theatre (Fig. 372, etc.), in which the play is broken up by grotesque pantomime, acrobatic feats, and clowning. In the

<sup>1</sup> This has many resemblances to the first successful open-air production of the German Theatre, Karlheinz Martin's *Franziska* (Vienna, 1923) (Fig. 362). On this stage the entrance was a complete circle, rising gently toward the right (by steps and inclined planes) and going up abruptly on the left (by a special stair). Since then there have been many solutions of the problem of the open-air theatre, by Treichlinger, Kiesler, and others.

<sup>2</sup> This is strikingly like the plan, also founded on the method of an open-air theatre, of producing *The Divine Comedy*, by Max Reinhardt and Norman Bel-Geddes (New York, 1923) (Fig. 363).

<sup>3</sup> Here we must especially mention A. R. Neppach with his formal setting of Toller's *Transformation*, which has been much imitated. We can note the same dramatic feeling in the symbolical architectural settings of Reigbert, Hay, Sievert, Jones, and others.



vast variety of attempts to solve the problem of the theatre, which we can only mention in passing, we cannot be surprised at this kind of symbolism, borrowed from the circus and the variety show, and appealing to the happy artlessness of a public that adores the theatre. If we wish to find a historical parallel we might compare these scenes with the mechanical stage effects to be found in eighteenth-century comedy, or the clowning or torture-scenes of the pre-Shakespearean period.

Such methods will hardly carry us any further. More valuable for our study are the settings for Revolutionary plays by K. Vialkov and Tatlin—the last that we need mention in this connection. If we compare Fig. 304 with Kandinsky's impromptu in Fig. 301 we shall find, even in its outward aspect, an astonishing resemblance in the means of expression and their employment. As in the case of Kandinsky, use is made of elementary forms; but with Tatlin these possess an undeniable theatrical effectiveness. In Fig. 304 we have a central pillar, about which a path winds in a circle, while the left side is covered by something like a sail; with the aid of a succession of different coloured lights, this symbolical setting, which is hardly meant to accommodate a large number of actors,<sup>1</sup> or at the most for only a few brief moments, is capable of producing a strong dramatic effect.

### THE THEORY OF THE MASS THEATRE

We now come to stage-settings, which belong to the last class that we have to consider, the Mass Theatre. It is not strange that so rich a theatrical life, fostered by so keen a popular demand for the symbolical presentation of human life and fate, should express itself in this form. Here, again, particular features recur, which belong to ancient history, and remind us of the naumachia successfully performed in the Circus under the Roman Empire. The Italian *trionfi* too, which occur so constantly in the history of the theatre, found a parallel in Russia, with its marked fondness for public processions and demonstrations.<sup>2</sup> In illustration of this theme, let us compare the model of the scene for the festival *Battle and Victory* with that of the pile of rocks, chosen (as we see in Naudet's picture) for the *Fête de l'Être Suprême* on the Champs de Mars at Paris, in June 1794 (Figs. 385 and 383). The ideas to be expressed, liberation from tyranny and the like, are in both cases the same, and the absolute resemblance in the outline of the two built-up scenes is astonishing. But while the French scene was full of the romantic feeling of an age inspired by Rousseau's nature symbolism, and hence showed rocks and grottos, and the liberated crowd climbing up toward the trees overhanging the statue of the new divinity, the Russian scene presents an epitome of the forms that a mathematical and mechanical age regard as expressive. These Russian open-air symbols always

<sup>1</sup> Should this idea be developed, then we come back—as in the case of numberless designs for the 'free' Russian stage, especially for Revolutionary plays and festivals—to a type of performance in which the theatre exists only in imagination, and the scenery stands by and for itself, a method practised in the seventeenth century by Servandoni and others (Gregor, *Scenic Art*, vol. i, p. 103, etc.).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Carter, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

betray a childlike delight in setting a machine in motion—the joy of a wheel spinning madly round, of the play of a connecting-rod, the hissing of a safety-valve, the click of cog-wheels. What the workman, when he thought himself oppressed, regarded as a symbol of his slavery seems to become, at the moment of his freedom, a symbol of his deliverance and even more a sign of his power. In just the same way the hated account-books of Capitalism, cash-book and ledger, are now honoured, as witnesses to the success of the new economic system. The introduction of such technical motives on the stage, and especially on the film, may be called a kind of pragmatic symbolism, that gets its effect, without transition, from the very trophies that it has just won. In an ancient triumph slaves were led along, if possible in the costume of their country, and bearing its products, and this is just such a piece of theatrical pragmatic symbolism. The heraldry of the Middle Ages, which played a prominent part in festival processions, owed its origin to the same tendency.

Similarly the Russian demonstrations and festival processions are full of examples of this pragmatic symbolism, the simplest of all the many methods we have mentioned; we may instance their arsenal of flags, sometimes illuminated at night with extraordinary effect, a theatrical device unknown in the West. Then there is the carrying of machines and tools as symbols of the classes aspiring to power, and of caricatures of the classes that are abdicating (money-bags, tall hats, uniforms, and weapons, Fig. 398), as symbols of the supremacy that is overthrown. As any object can have a dramatic significance in this respect, it is in pragmatic symbolism that the distinction between real life and the theatre vanishes soonest; to some such instinct, perhaps, we may trace the universal desire not only to see theatrical performances, but to act in them, as shown in the countless workmen's, peasants', and children's theatres and theatrical clubs.<sup>1</sup>

We see also the attempt to repeat actual life in the theatre, and, so to speak, set history on the stage. The pictures that Naudet and De Machy made of the *Fête de l'Être Suprême* soon turn the historical event into the usual conventional theatrical style of the eighteenth century; but the *auto-da-fé* shown in De Machy's picture—probably the burning of the figures of kings, or some such pragmatic symbols—belongs to the sphere of pragmatic symbolism. The triumphal car shown in another picture by the same artist is one of the stock allegorical properties of the conventional theatre of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and thus comes under a higher form of symbolism. Full of interest is the mingling of styles in the triumphal car seen in Fig. 381, which gives the wholly allegorical figure of the conqueror on his car, but shows in front of him the prostrate figure of a king, trampled on by *sansculottes*—an obvious piece of primitive pragmatic symbolism. The change from pragmatic symbolism to a higher stage, that of allegory, is evident in pageants; once the defeated dragon itself was borne in triumph, but a more cultured taste was satisfied by bearing it in heraldry on the shield;

<sup>1</sup> Information about the children's and peasants' theatres is collected in *Teatr yunch sriteley, 1922-27* (Leningrad, 1927), and Tolbuzin, *Prostye i sloznye ploskibadke v derovne* (Moscow, 1927).

and we can readily foresee that in the Russian theatre, too, these pragmatic symbols that cost so much to win will persist as a sort of heraldry of the pageant.

The dramatic representation of the storming of the Winter Palace, staged under Evreinov's management<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 390, etc.), and, on a larger scale, the plan for accurately reproducing all the events of the Revolution of 1917 on the stage, is clearly an instance of sheer pragmatic symbolism. It is marked as such not merely on account of the use of the actual scenes, weapons, uniforms, lorries, and such-like, and even the real persons concerned in the Revolution, but especially by the attempt to bring on the stage the course of recent history, without translating it into fiction, the modern equivalent of the allegory of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The representation of recent history on the stage has often taken place, as is proved by Æschylus's *Persæ*, or the performance of a Christian mystery in the time of the Emperor Julian, which Strindberg has made quite credible in a historical study. The Great War too has given birth to dramatic literature of this sort in almost all countries; but this, after all, is literature, not real life; it is only in Russia that an attempt has been made to put the facts of history straight on to the stage, without alteration.

Such a method is without doubt a striking instance of the natural dramatic talent of the Russian people, but it puts an end to all analysis of the art of the theatre, for it breaks down all barriers between real life and the stage. If we are to bring on the boards historical events, or episodes of daily life, work and play, our schools and our law-courts, just as they are, we have destroyed the theatre. We need no art, no dramatist, no rehearsals, no audience; we merely repeat on the stage what has been done off it.

### THE LIMITS OF ANALYSIS

Here we may close our study of the Russian theatre. We observe in Russia an astonishing impulse toward the theatre, an enthusiasm for its art, such as can only be paralleled in the ancient world. This impulse to the theatre expresses itself through actors drawn from a nation remarkable for its dramatic talent, and audiences with an equally remarkable passion for the theatre. How this intense love of the stage arose in Russia is a question outside the scope of this section of our work; we do not propose to discuss the social importance and influence of the theatre. Still, we may point out here that this impulse toward the theatre, this ceaseless concern with its practical problems, has given rise to an analysis that has gone to the very root of the laws of theatrical effect. Thus it is that alongside of the greatest and completest organizations, such as Stanislavsky's Art Theatre and the Russian Ballet under Bakst's successors, we find phenomena that take theatrical art back to a remote stage of history, to its very elements. We think we have succeeded in showing that Tairov's spatial symbolism embodies elements of

<sup>1</sup> The chief dramatic adviser of the latest Russian school of drama (*Dramaticheskie Sochinenia*; Petrograd, 1922, etc.).

the *baroque* theatre, Vachtangov's ironical symbolism includes elements of the Shakespearean theatre, Mayerhold's mobile symbolism has elements of the ancient Chorus and Mime, and the practical symbolism of processions and festivals rests on principles found in similar displays in bygone ages. The Russian theatre presents a unique spectacle; its analysis allows us to observe phenomena, historically scattered over many centuries, repeated, side by side, within the narrowest limits of space and time.

Let us refer again, as we did at the start of our inquiry, to the parallel that we drew with another branch of art, a parallel that explains, in our opinion, the development of the art of the Russian theatre. The art of primitive religious painting followed its course till it became an artless juxtaposition of elementary forms that had acquired a certain definite meaning. In the icon, and in primitive illuminated books, a fiery wheel stands for a chariot, a blue circle for a cloud, a jagged group of spires for a city, and a few slabs laid stairwise for a mountain. These elementary symbols with their fixed significance are easy to understand, they need no special arrangement as a composition, they call up the desired association with absolute success. It seems to us that the analytical method of the Russian theatre follows the same path, that it attains to simple, unequivocal symbols, which represent comparatively the same meaning as the painted symbols of ancient art. It was an extraordinarily intense religious sense that led to the analysis of the painter's art into its simple, primary elements; and one cannot help wondering at the energy with which the genius of the theatre has followed a similar course.

One thing, however, we still desire for the future of the Russian theatre: it has proved its ability to try the elements of its art in the fire like precious metals, and so to display them that we fancy we see before us the treasures of a richer and long-since-vanished past; may it yet show us that it possesses the power to achieve that mighty synthesis which is the goal of all intellectual activity.



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FOUNDATIONS

SERF THEATRE

COURT THEATRE

LITTLE THEATRE

ART THEATRE



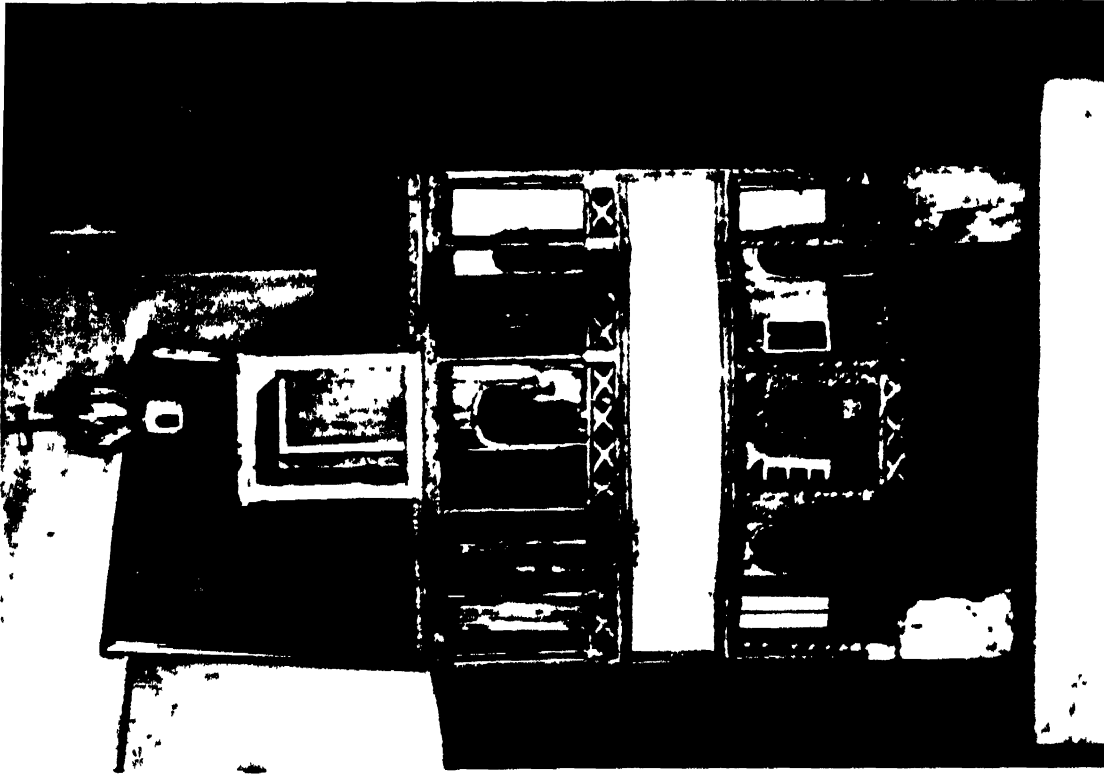


Fig 1 PUPPET THEATRE IN THE VILLAGE OF K. M. -

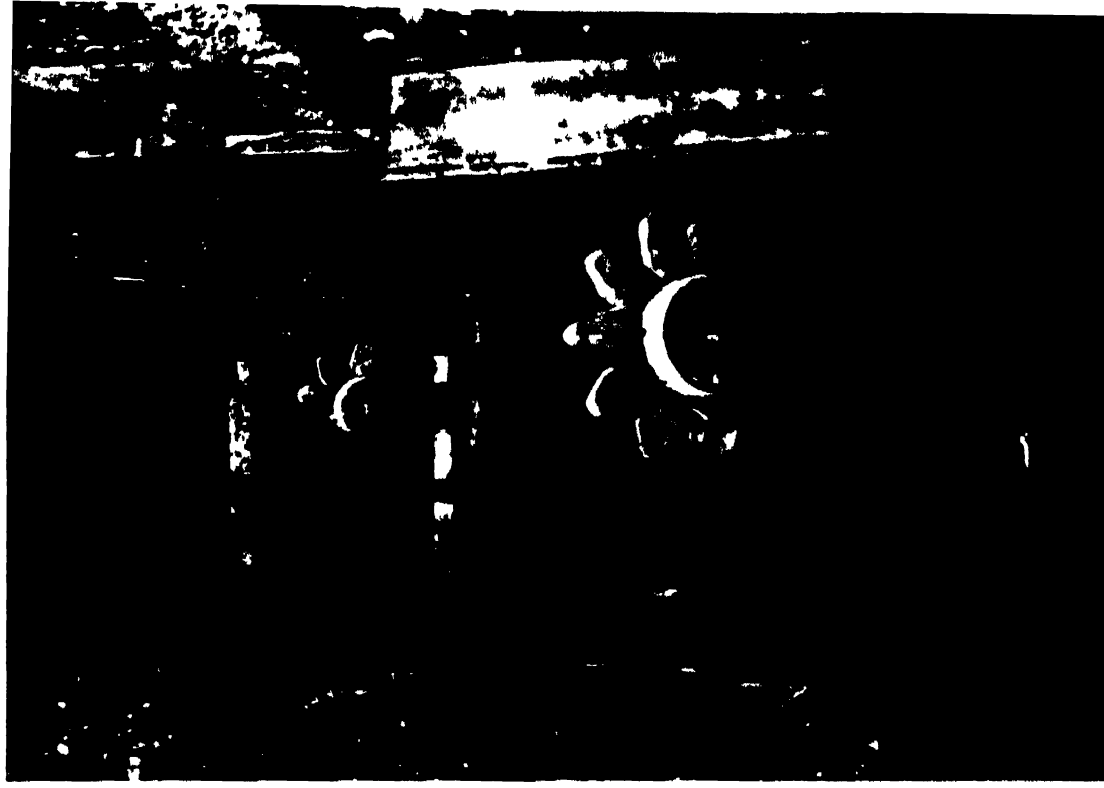


Fig 2 SERI THEATRE (STANKING) THUNDER MACHINE



Fig 4 Cod Slav 5, APOCALYPSE, FOL 54r  
National Library, Vienna

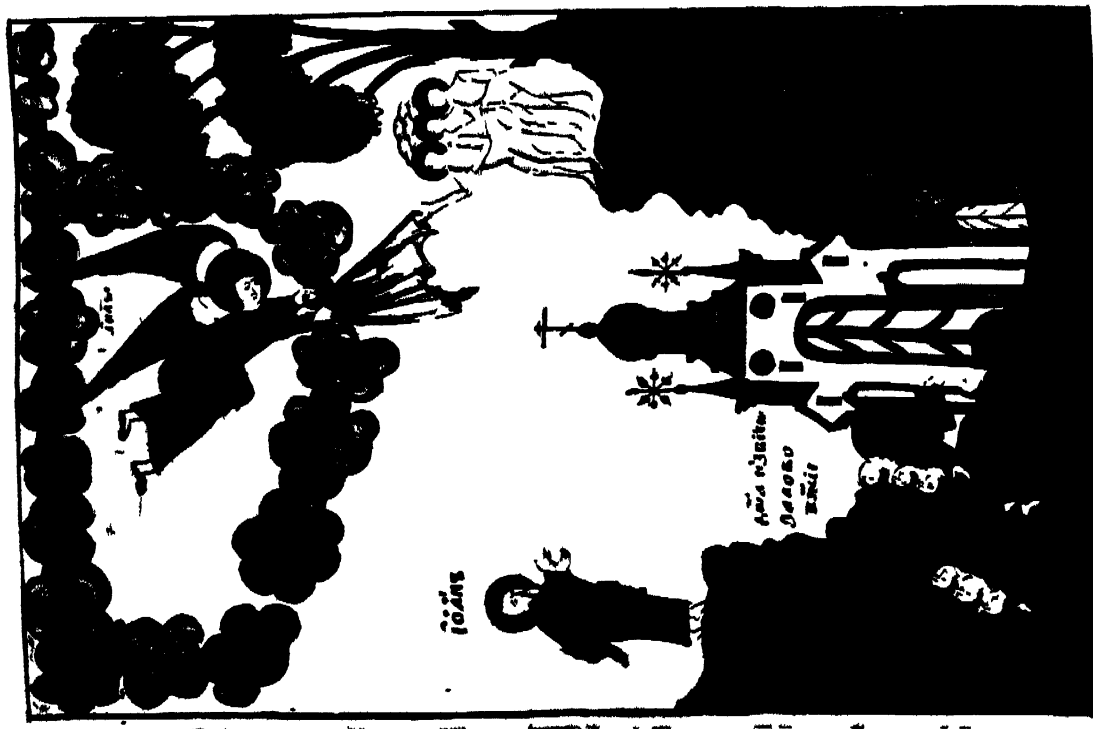


Fig 3 Cod Slav 5, APOCALYPSE, FOL 41r  
National Library, Vienna



Fig. 5. "THE ASSUMPTION OF ELIJAH"  
*Rubtsovsky Collection, Moscow*



Fig. 6. COD. SLAV. 5. APOCALYPSE, FOL. 54V  
*National Library, Vienna*



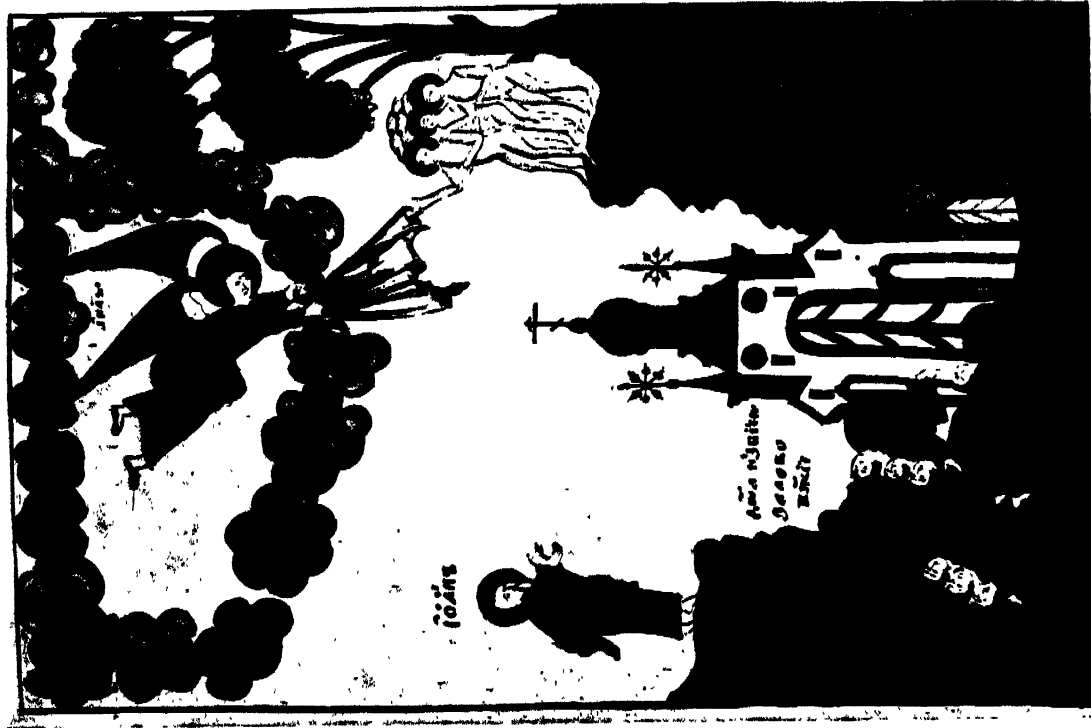


Fig. 3. COD. SLAV. 5, APOCALYPSE, FOL. 41r  
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Fig. 4. COD. SLAV. 5, APOCALYPSE, FOL. 54r  
National Library, Vienna



Fig. 5. "THE ASSUMPTION OF ELIJAH"  
*Riabujinsky Collection, Moscow*



Fig. 6. COD. SLAV. 5. APOCALYPSE, FOL. 54v  
*National Library, Vienna*



Fig. 7. TURKISH MARIONETTE THEATRE, MOSCOW, NINETEENTH CENTURY

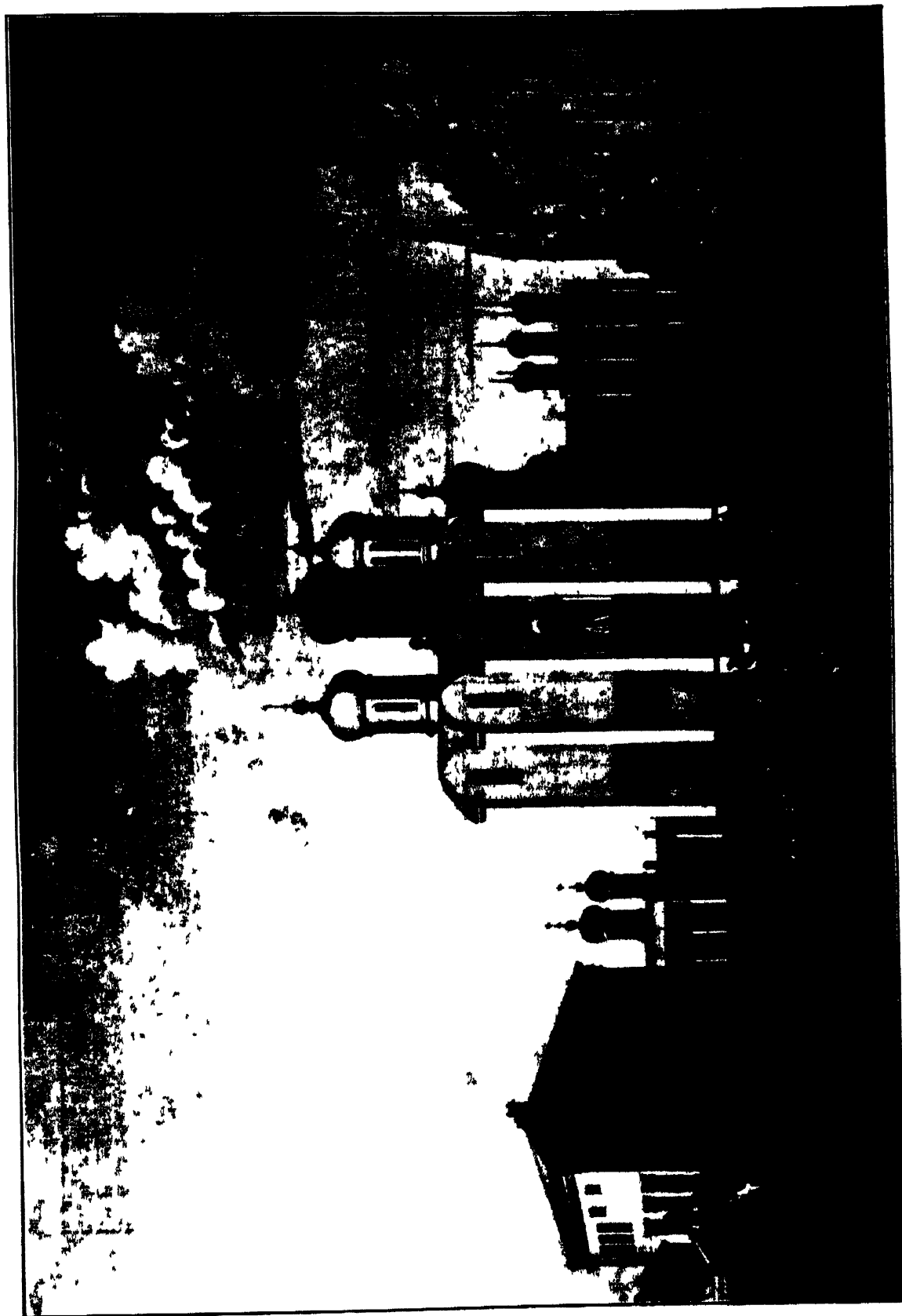


Fig 8. BOOK OF THE CORONATION OF THE EMPRESS ANNE (1730) CORONATION PROCESSION  
*National Library, Vienna*

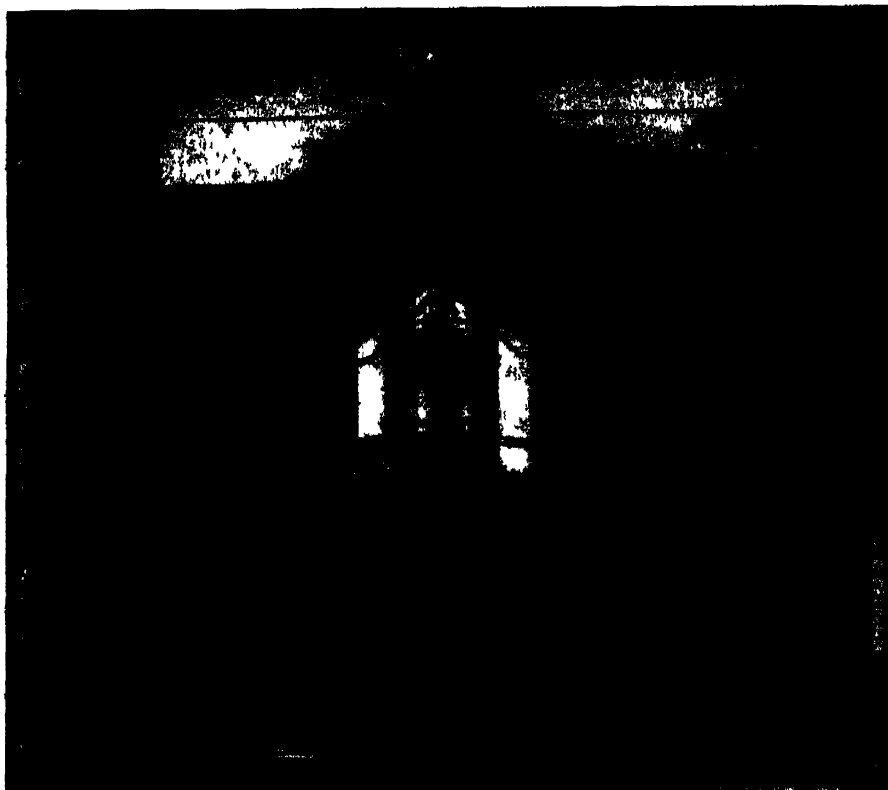


Fig. 9. BOX IN THE SERF THEATRE AT OSTANKINO



Fig. 10. CORONATION OF THE EMPRESS ANNE (1730). Tailpiece

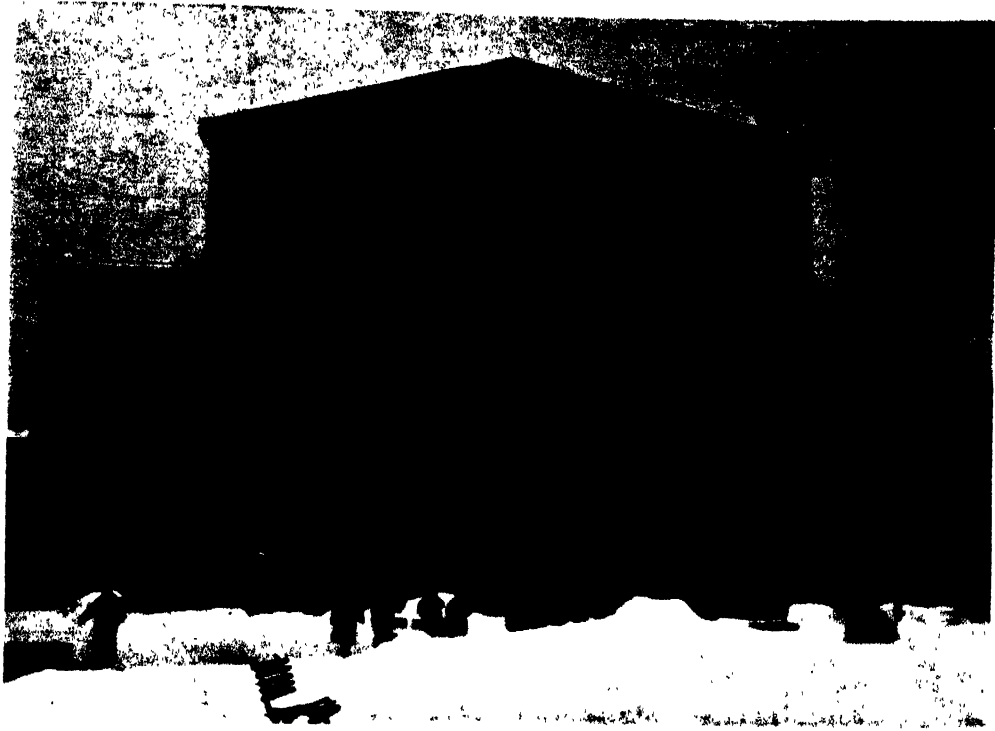


Fig. 11. GRAND THEATRE,



Fig. 12. BUKARIN: "ON SUCH A NIGHT!"  
Court Theatre, 1891. Scenery by Janov



Fig. 13. SCENE FROM "HAMLET"  
Court Theatre, 1891. Scenery by Heltzer



Fig. 14. SCENE FROM "EUGENE ONEGIN"  
Court Theatre, 1893. Scenery by Botcharov



Fig. 13. RIMSKY-KORSAKOV: "MLADA"  
Court Theatre. 1893 Design by Repin



Fig. 16. SCENE FROM "EUGENE ONEGIN"  
Court Theatre. 1893. Figner, the singer





Fig 17. SCENE FROM "THE MERCHANT OF VENICE"  
Court Theatre, 1896. Scenery by Janov



Fig 18. "THETIS"  
Ballet given at St Petersburg on the occasion of the German Emperor's visit, 1897



FIG. 19. SCENE FROM A PLAY BY NEVISHINA  
Court Theatre, 1896

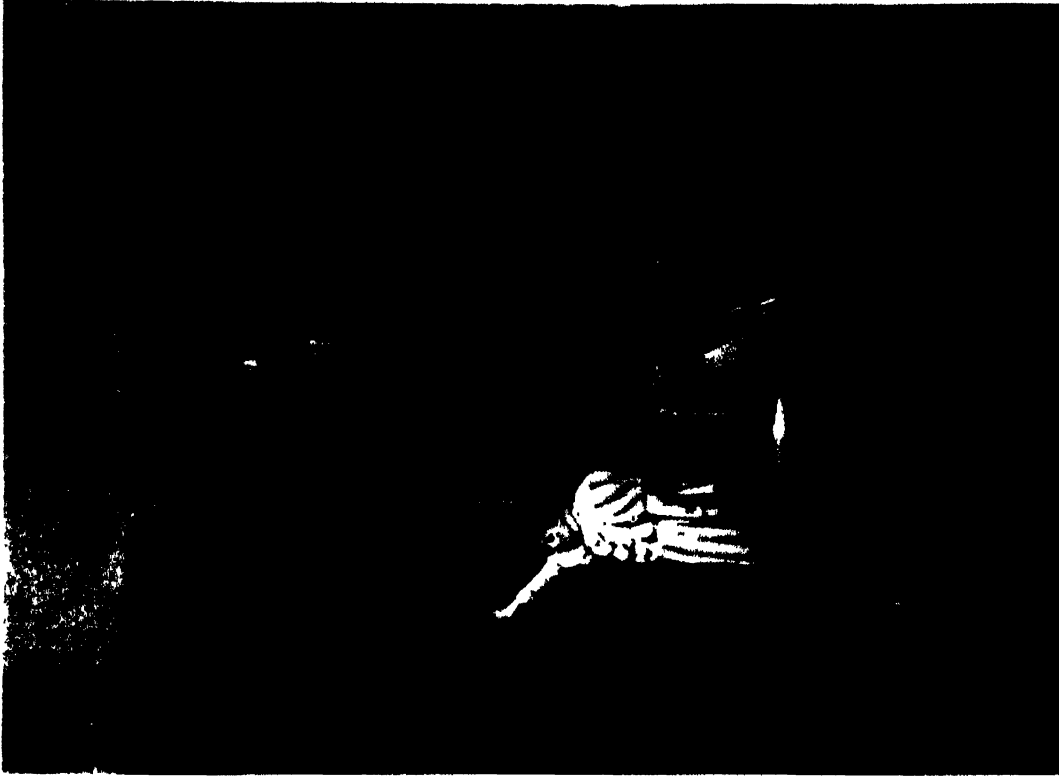


FIG. 20. SCENE FROM A PLAY BY NEMIROVITCH-DANCHENKO  
Court Theatre, 1896



Fig 21 SCENE FROM 'DON CARLOS'  
Little Theatre Moscow 1893

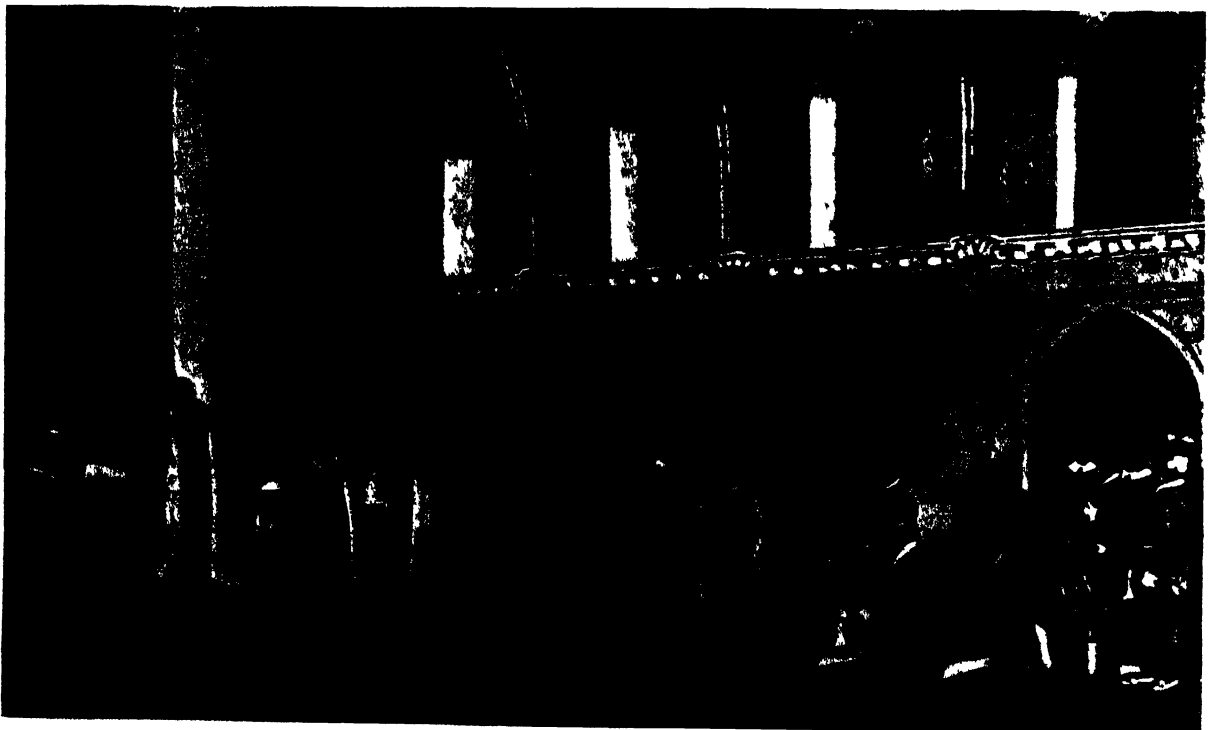


Fig 22 SCENE FROM 'MARIA STUART'  
Little Theatre Moscow, 1910



Fig. 3. *TSAR FIEDOR* — THE IRON WALL  
Little Theatre, Moscow



Fig. 4. *SCENE FROM "TSAR FIEDOR IVANOVICH"*  
Alexander Theatre, St. Petersburg



Fig. 29. SCENE FROM "THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR". Art Theatre, Moscow, 1908

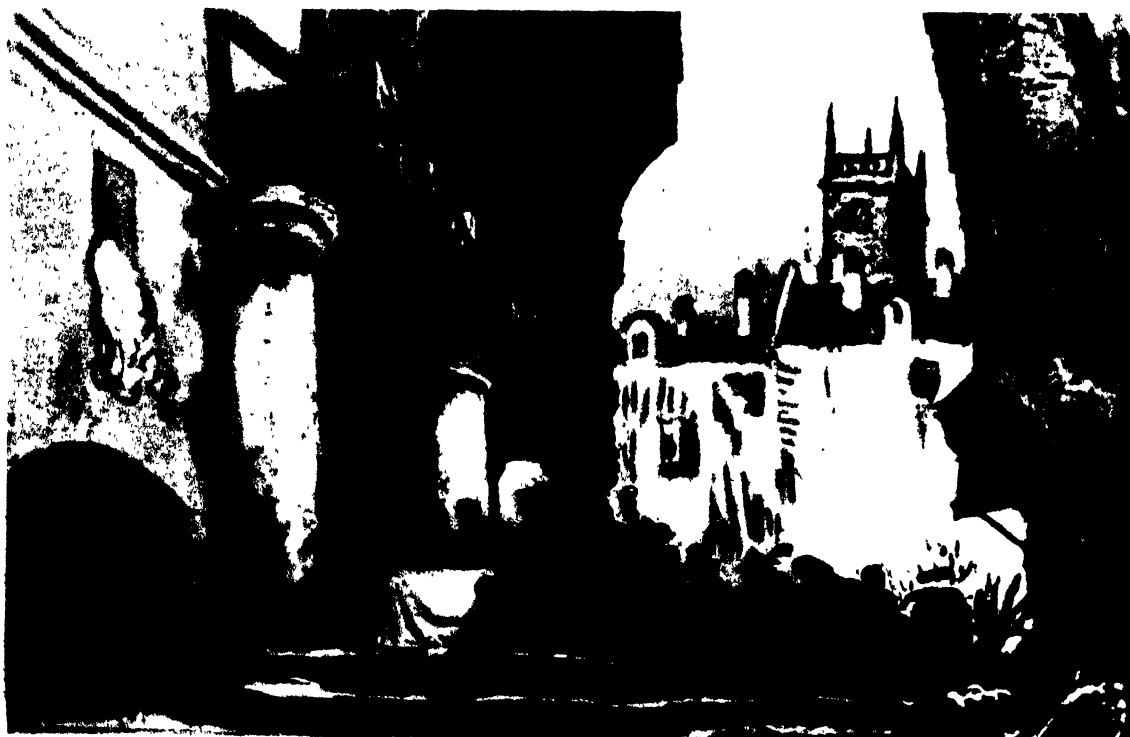


Fig. 30. A. BENOIS: "THE BANQUET IN PLAGUE-TIME". Art Theatre, Moscow



Fig. 31. SCENE FROM "TSAR FIODOR" Art Theatre, Moscow, 1922



Fig. 32. "THE TIME OF THE TURBINS" THE GERMAN GENERAL AND THE COSSACK HERMAN  
Art Theatre, Moscow  
*Photo by Dr Gregor, taken during the performance, 1927*

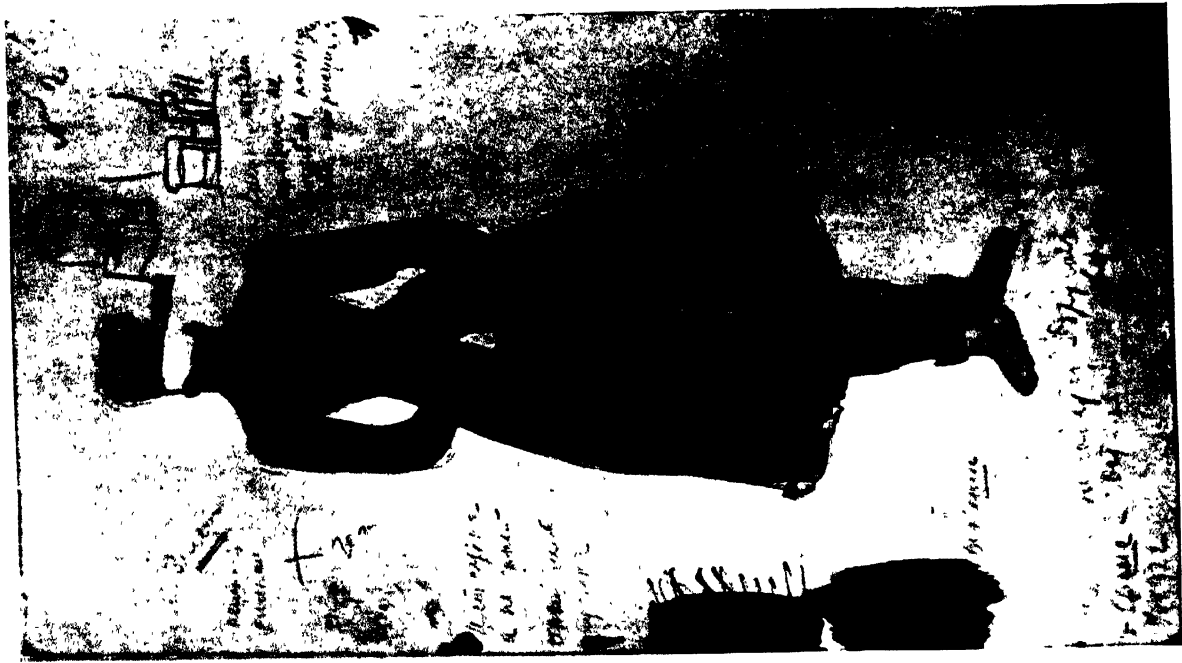


Fig. 33. STANISLAVSKY STUDIO: COSTUME SKETCH



Fig. 34. STANISLAVSKY STUDIO: COSTUME SKETCHES

# THE MOSCOW ART THEATRE









Fig 37 BILIBIN DESIGN FOR SCENERY IN A PAVLOVA BALLET

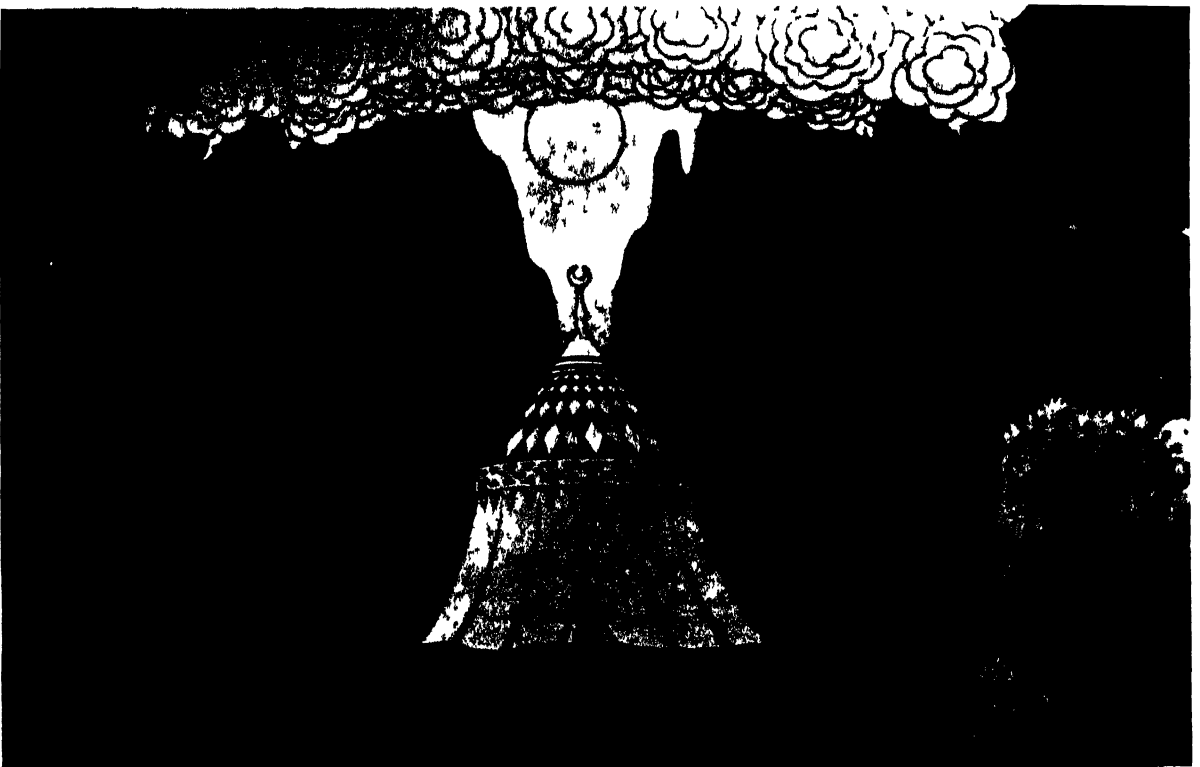


Fig 38 BILIBIN "LE COQ D'OR"

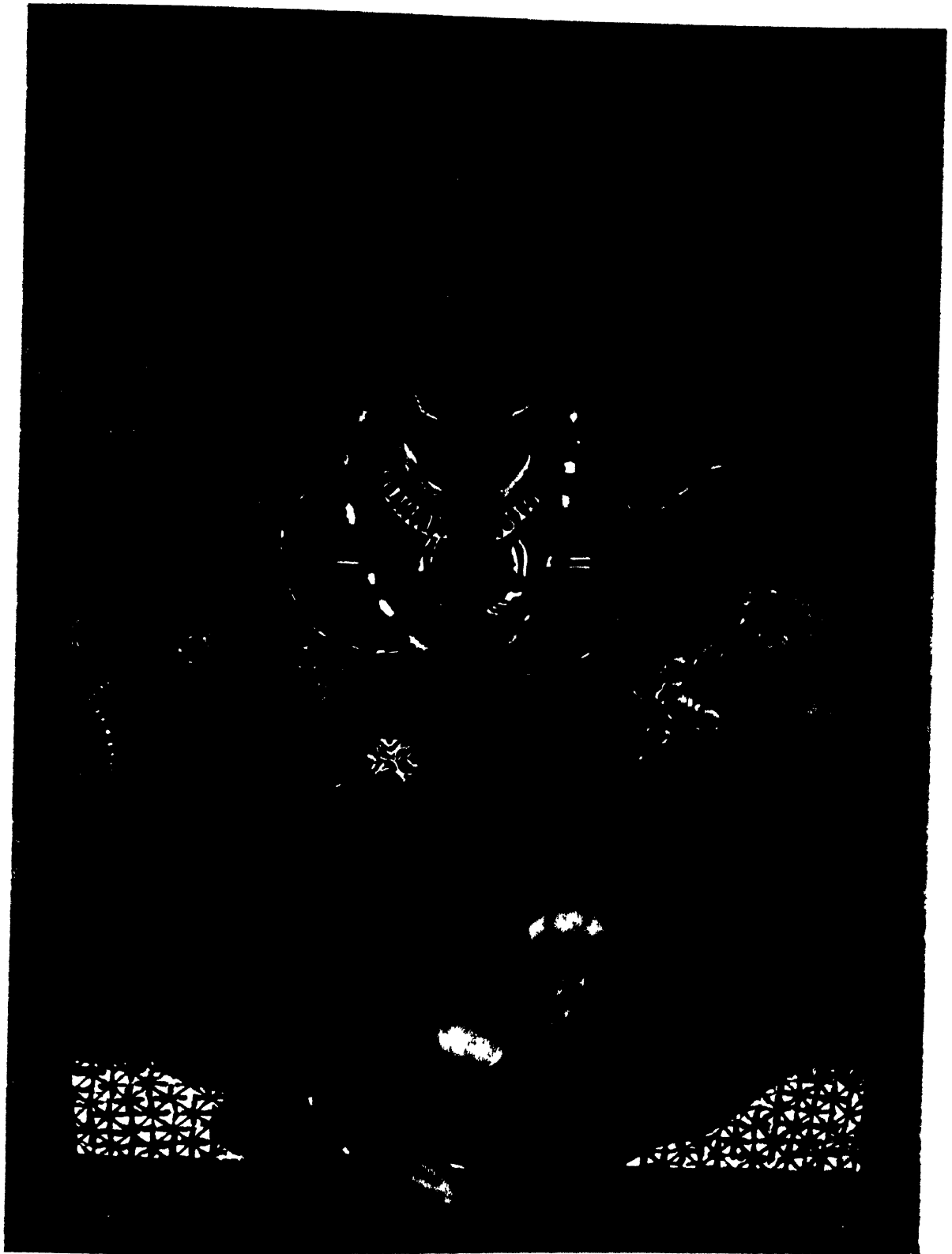


Fig 39. TCHERKOTIKINA COSTUME FOR "GHENGIZ KHAN"







Fig 42 THE DESCENT INTO HELL  
*Monover Collection No 104*



Fig 43 COD SLAV 5, APOCALYPSE, FOL 120V  
*National Library, Vienna*



Fig 44. BIRIBIN THE STORY OF THEOPHILUS



Fig 45. SHUKATY SCENE FROM "LEGISDE"





Fig 46 VASNETZOV SKETCH FOR MAMONTOV'S PRODUCTION OF  
LITTLE SNOWWHITE



Fig 47 VASNETZOV "OPRITCHNIK"



Fig. 48. GOLOVIN AND MAYERHOFF



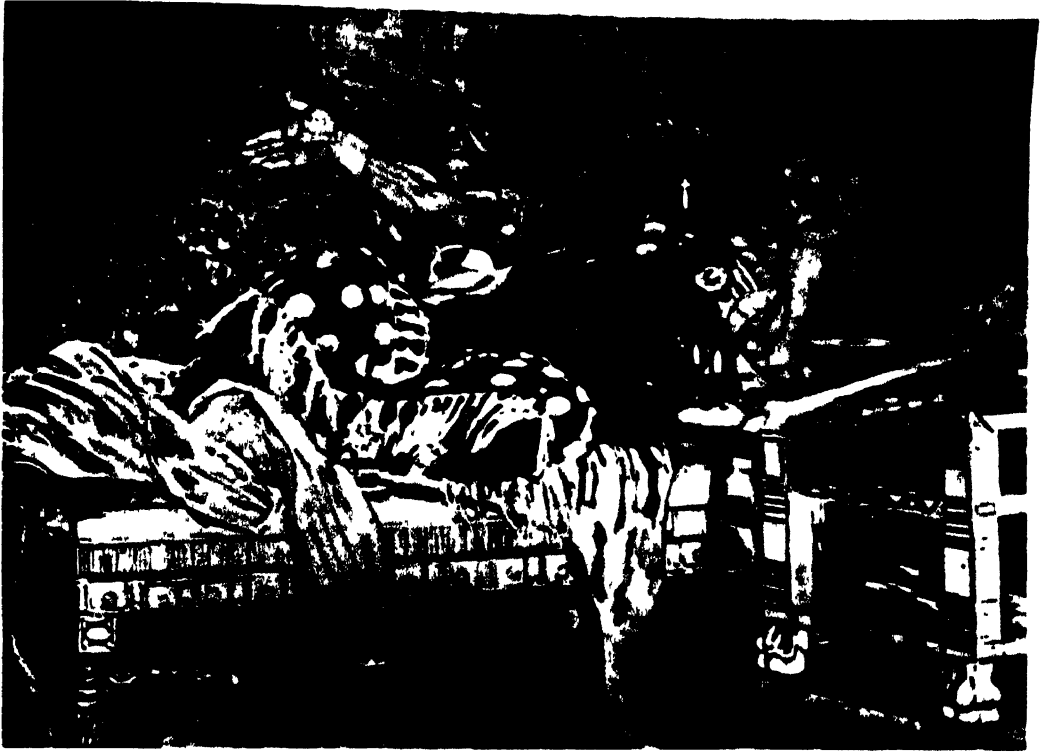
Fig. 49. GOLOVIN. EUGENE OSTROVSKY  
Bakuriani Museum-Monastery



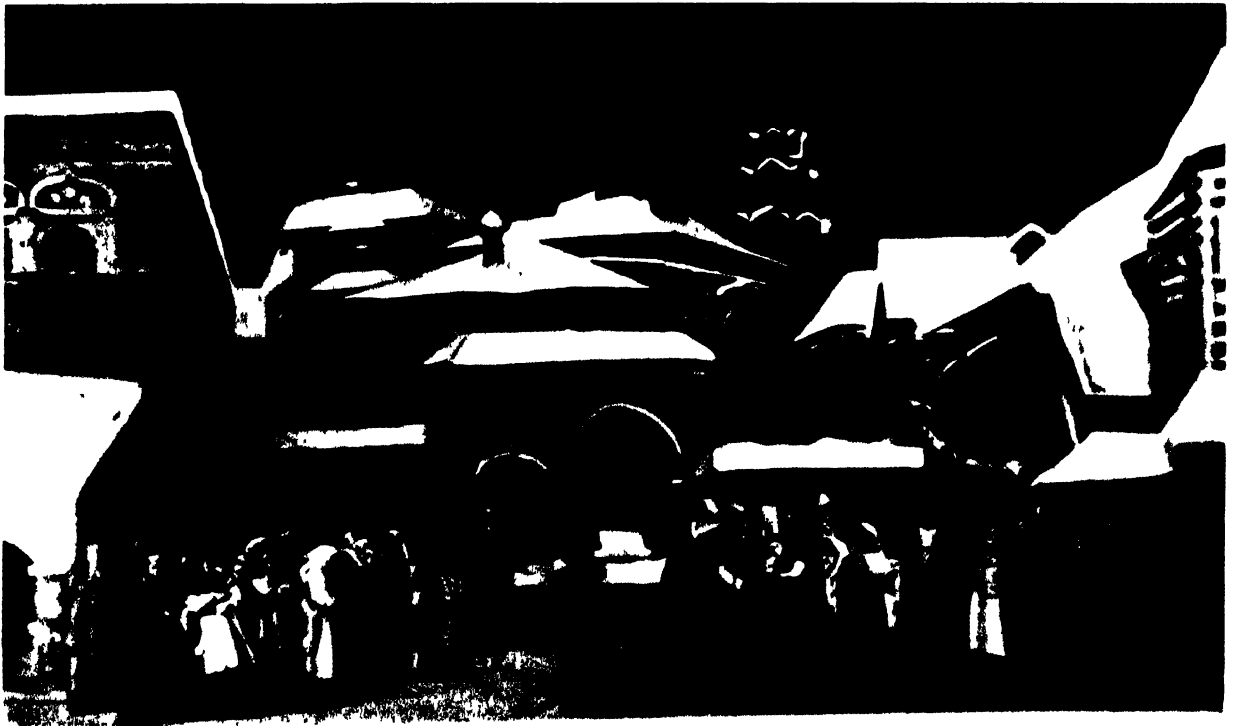
Fig 50 GOLOVIN ORPHEUS  
*Bakrushin Museum, Moscow*



Fig 51 GOLOVIN "THE STORM"



VIN — HOLOFERNES



. 53. P. KONCHATOVSKY — "KALASHNIKOV THE MERCHANT"

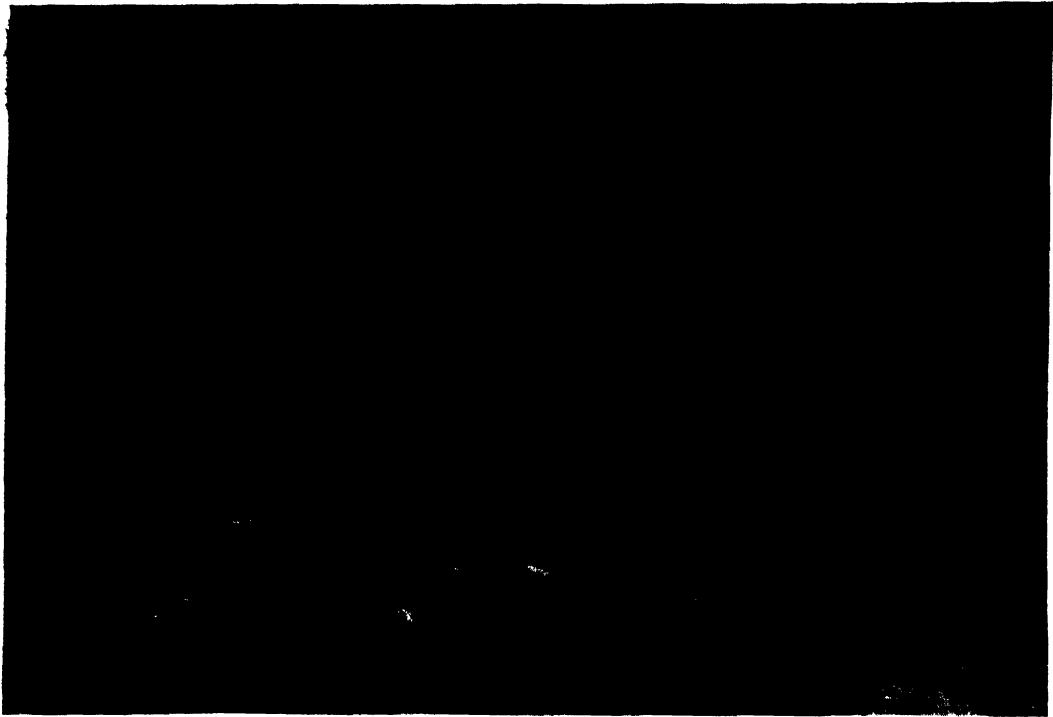


Fig 54 N ROFRICH ' LE SACRE DU PRINTemps



Fig 55 N SAPUNOV ' THE SHOW '

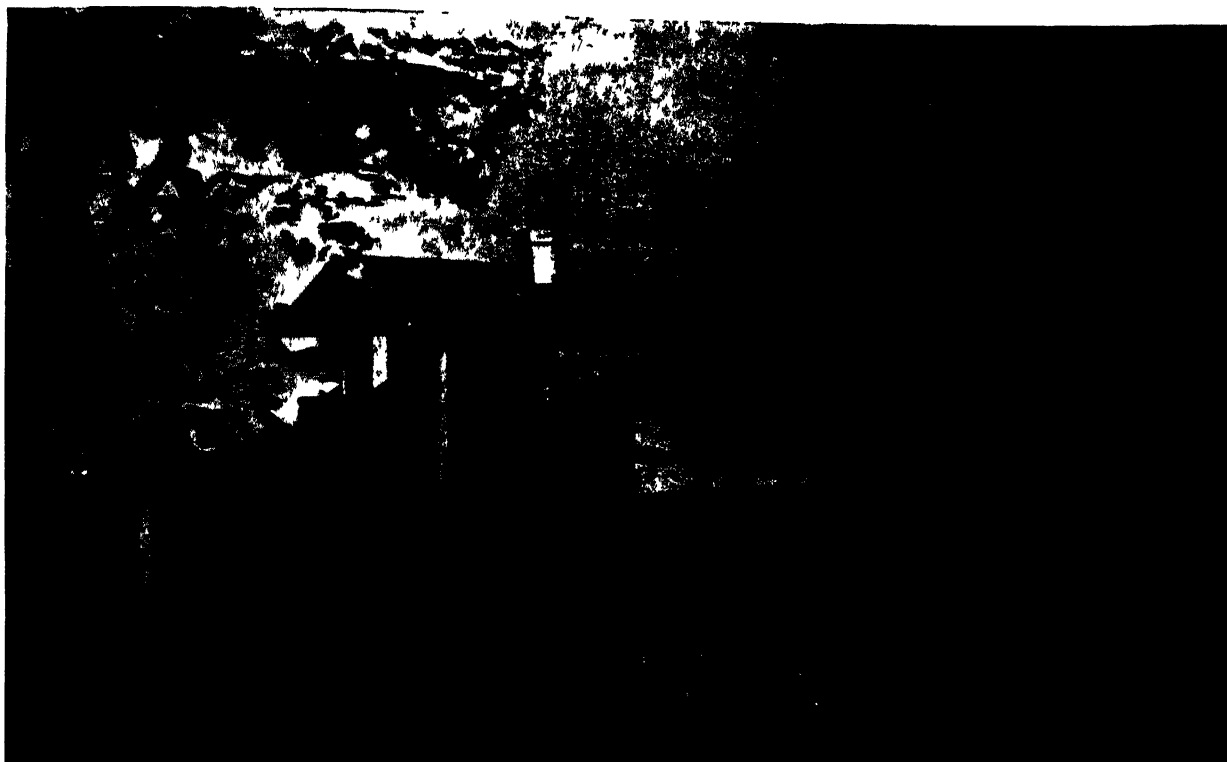


Fig 56 V SIMOV IVANOV



Fig 57 DOBUJINSKY "THE QUEEN OF SPADES" THE GAMBLING ROOMS



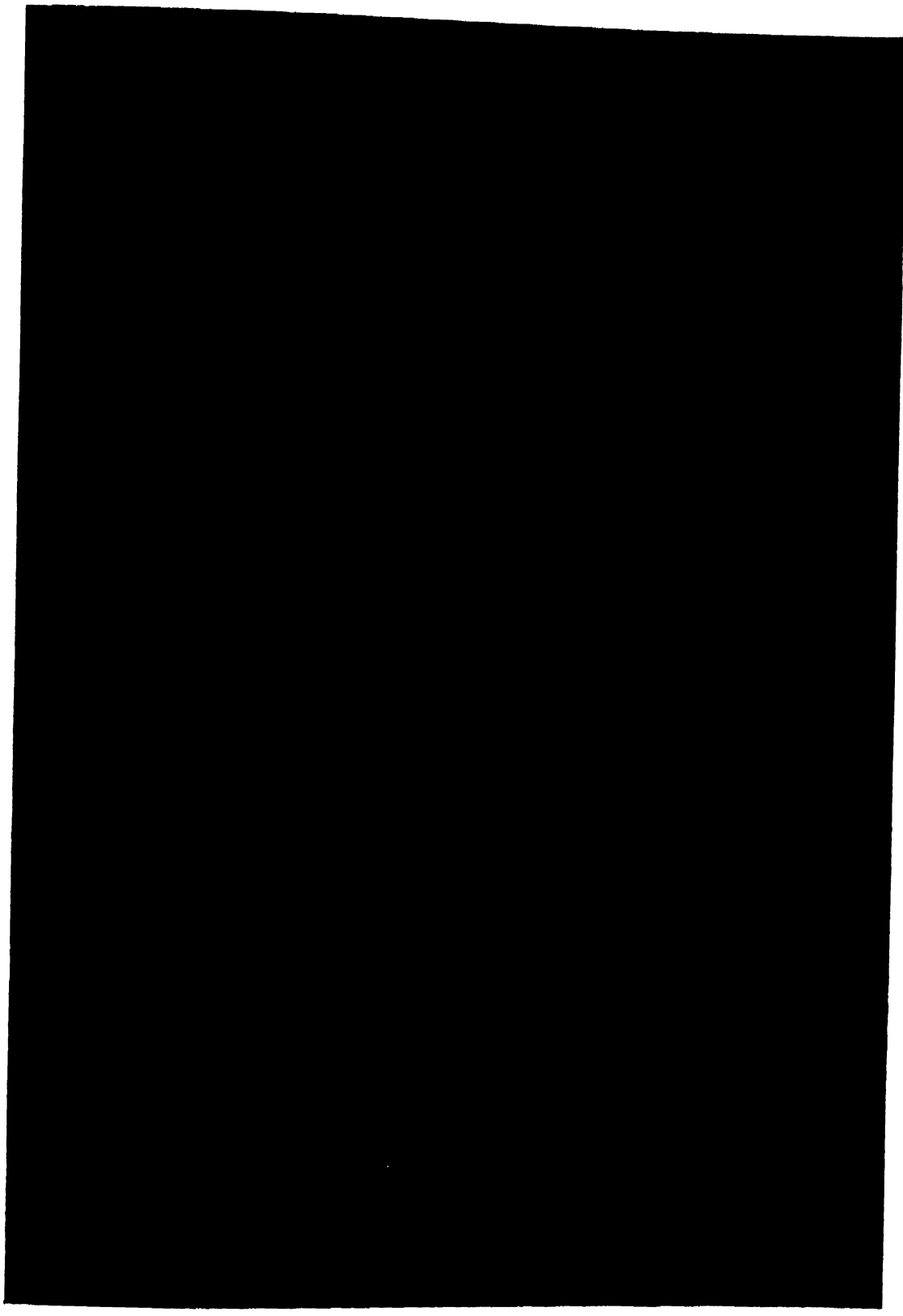


Fig. 58. S. SUDEIKIN: CURTAIN FOR "SALOMÉ"



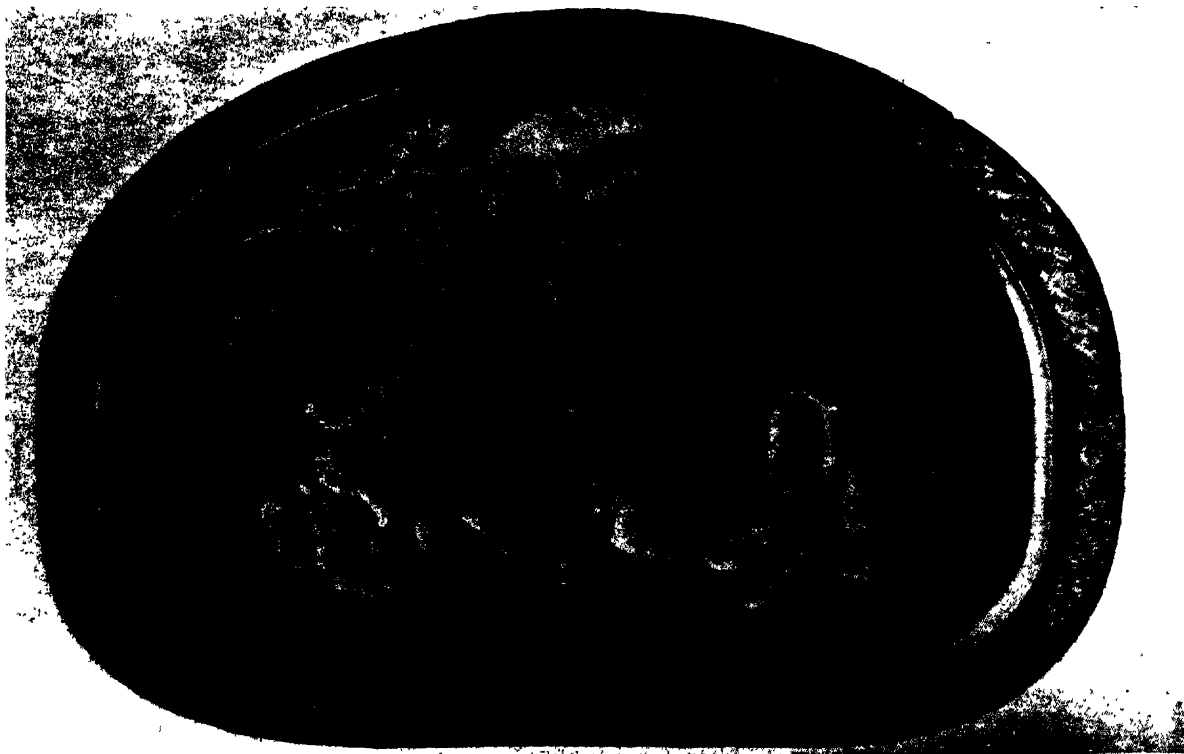


Fig. 59. S. SUDEIKIN: SCENERY FOR A BALLET



Fig. 60. DOBUJINSKY: GARDEN SCENE FROM "EUGENE ONEGIN"

Prudence  
Haut



Figs 61, 62 A BENOIS FIGURE STUDIES FOR "LA DAME AUX CAMÉLIAS"



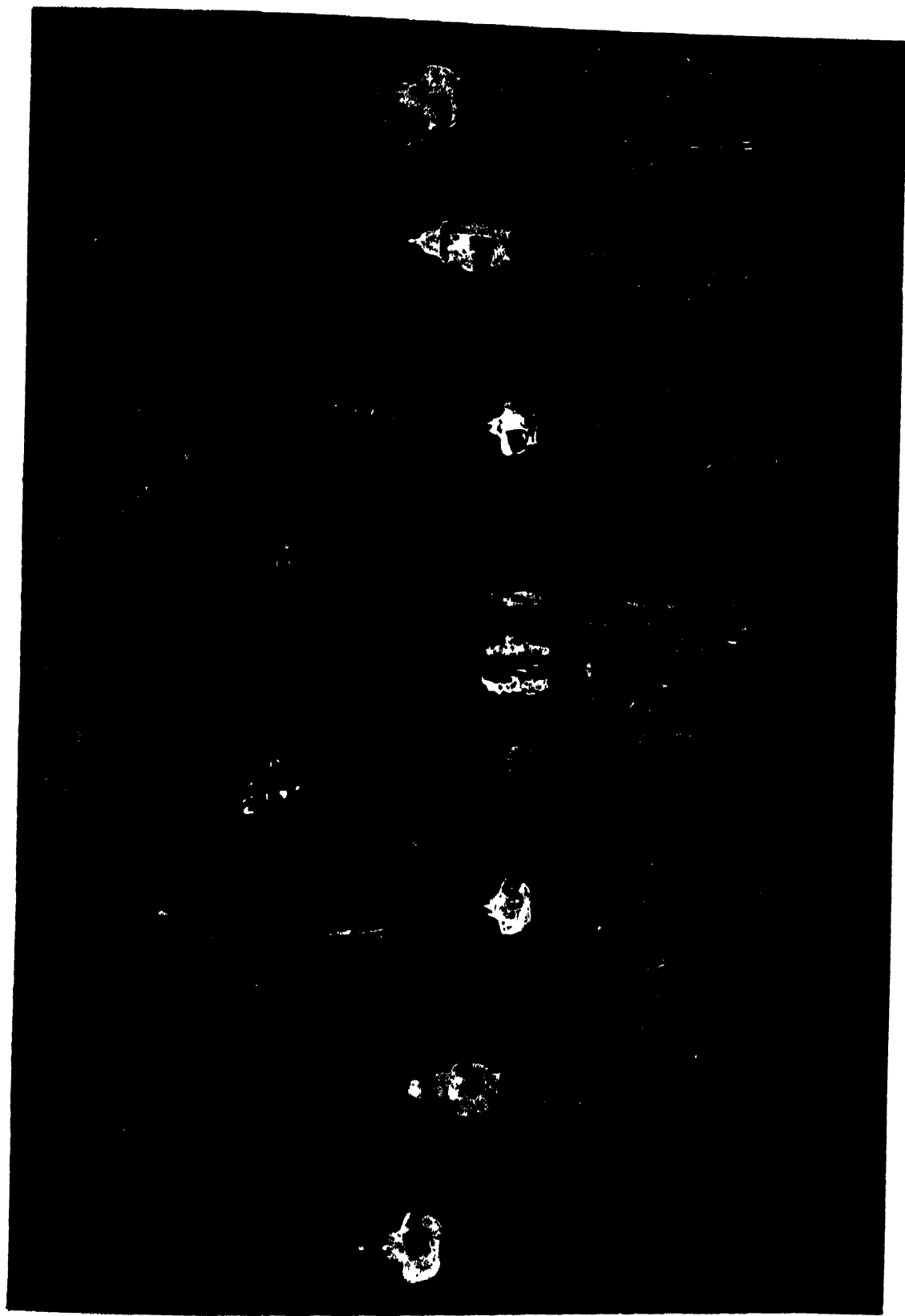


Fig. 63. A. BENOIS: CEREMONY SCENE FROM "LE MALADE IMAGINAIRE "



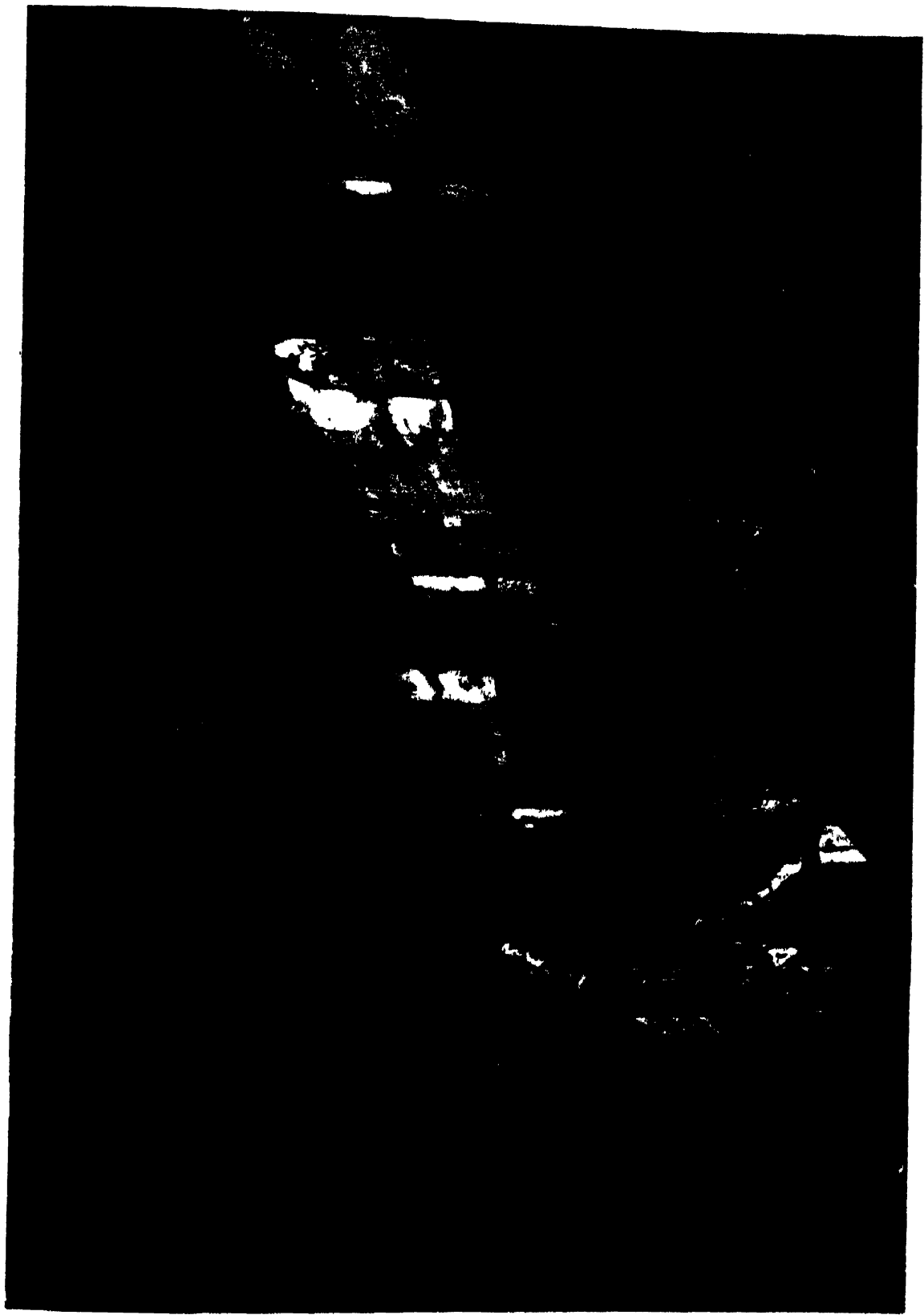


Fig. 64. A. BENOIS: "LE CLUB DES CORDELIERS". Napoleon-Film, 1925



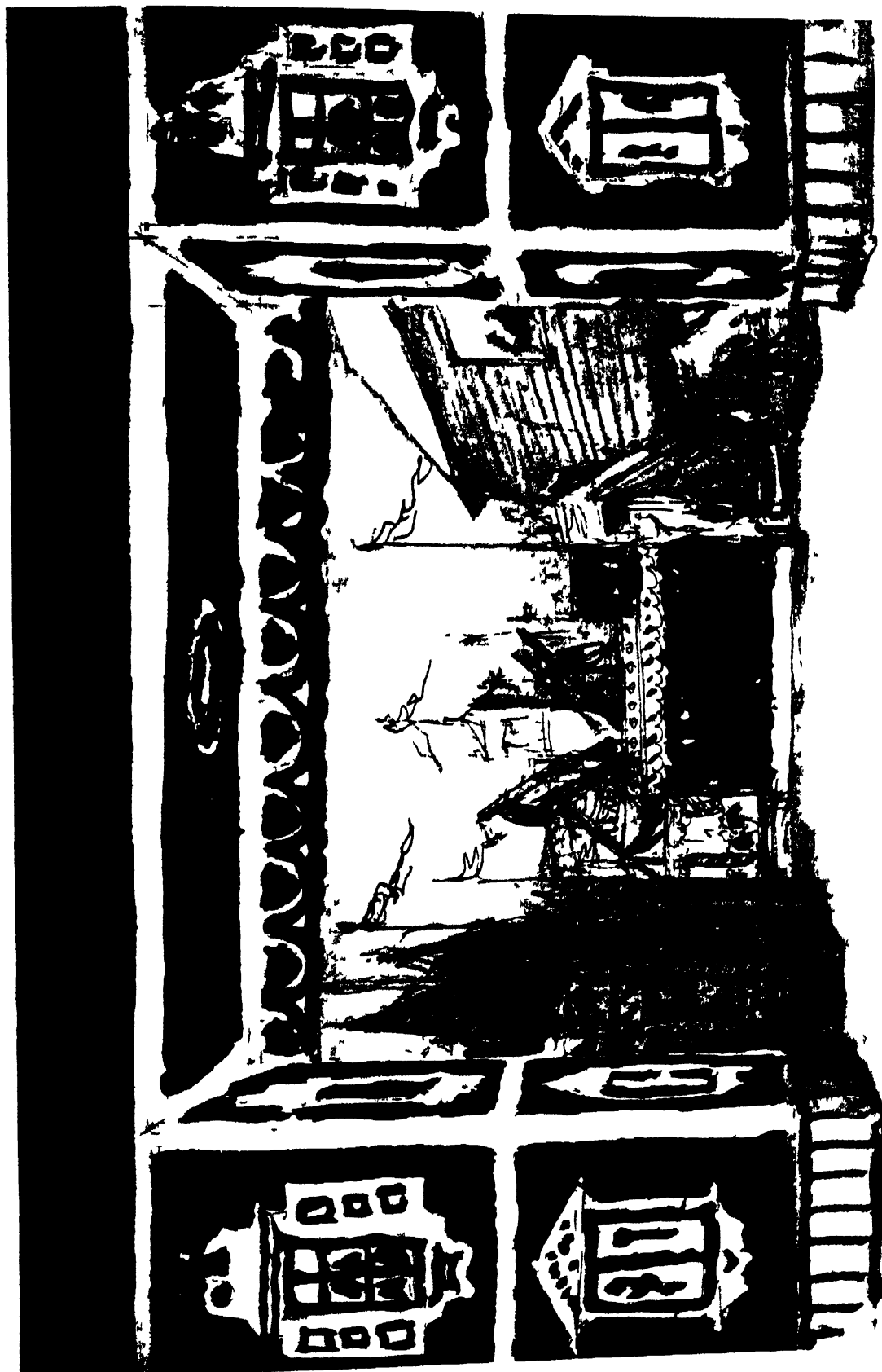


Fig 63 A BENOIS SKETCH FOR SCENERY FOR "PETRUSHKA"





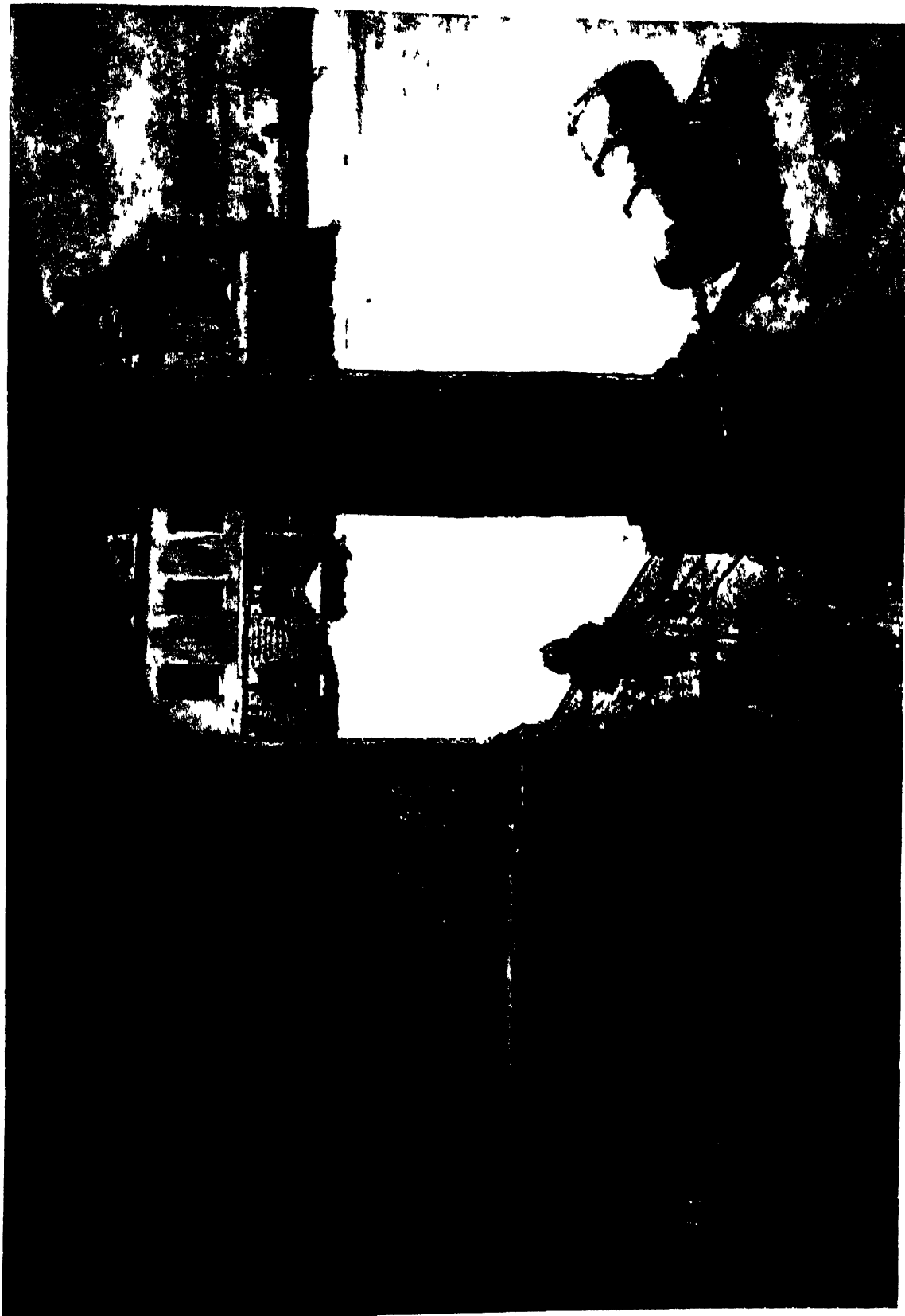


Fig 66 A BENOIS 'L'ÉCOLE DE BRIENNE" Napoleon-Film, 1925





Fig 67 A BENOIS ' THE IDIOT ' ACT II THE BOARDING-HOUSE





Fig 68 DOBUJINSKY "LA TRAVIATA" Chauve-souris







Fig 70 BENOIS LA DAME AUX CAMÉLIAS MARCURIUS DRAWING ROOM  
National Library Vienna



Fig 71 BENOIS LA DAME AUX CAMÉLIAS SCENE AT ACT II







Fig. 72. DOBUJINSKY: FIGURE STUDIES FOR "KABALE UND LIEBE"





Fig. 73. DOBUJINSKY: "A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY": THE BLUE ROOM



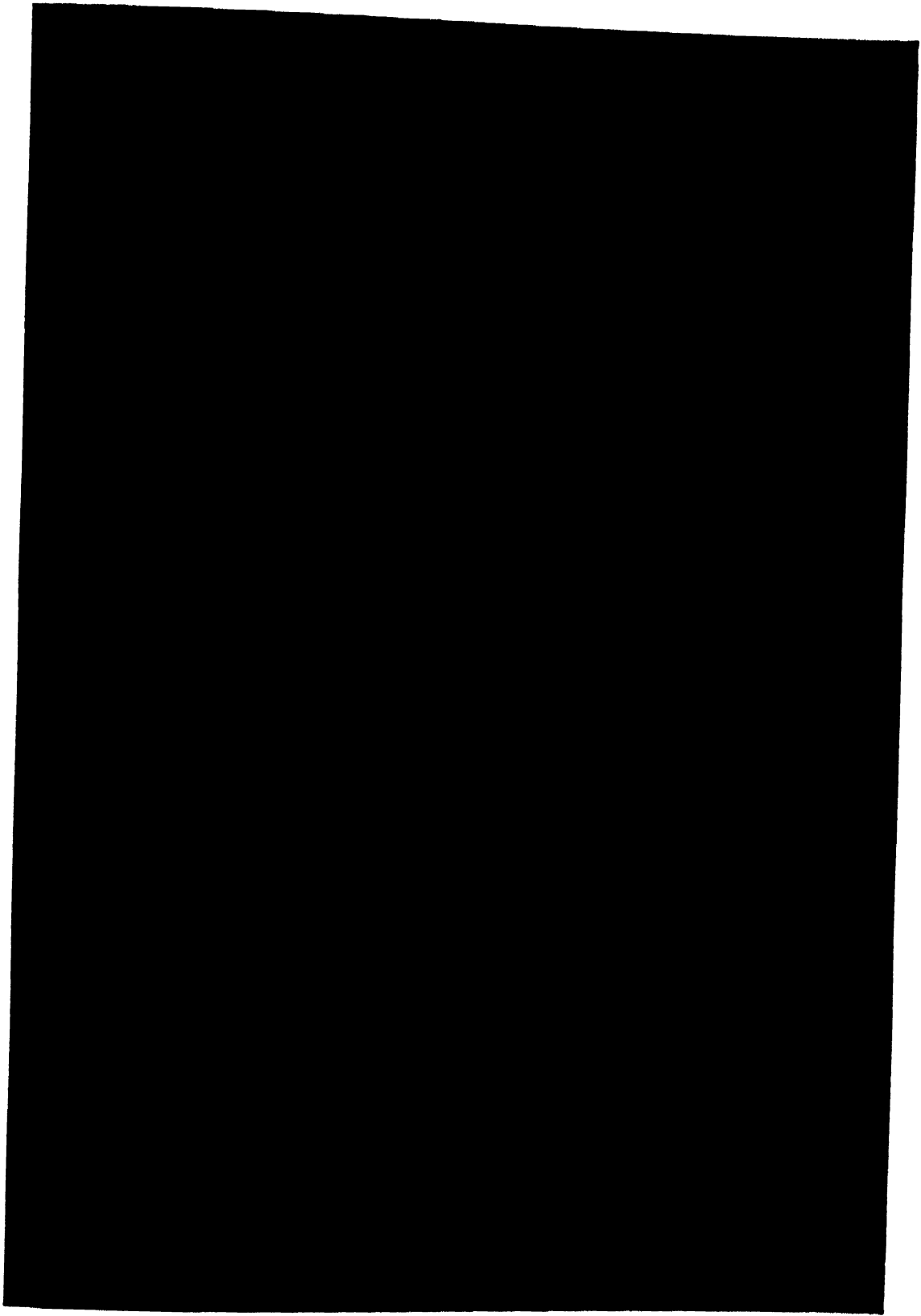


Fig. 74. DOBUJINSKY: "DIE RÄUBER": GALLERY



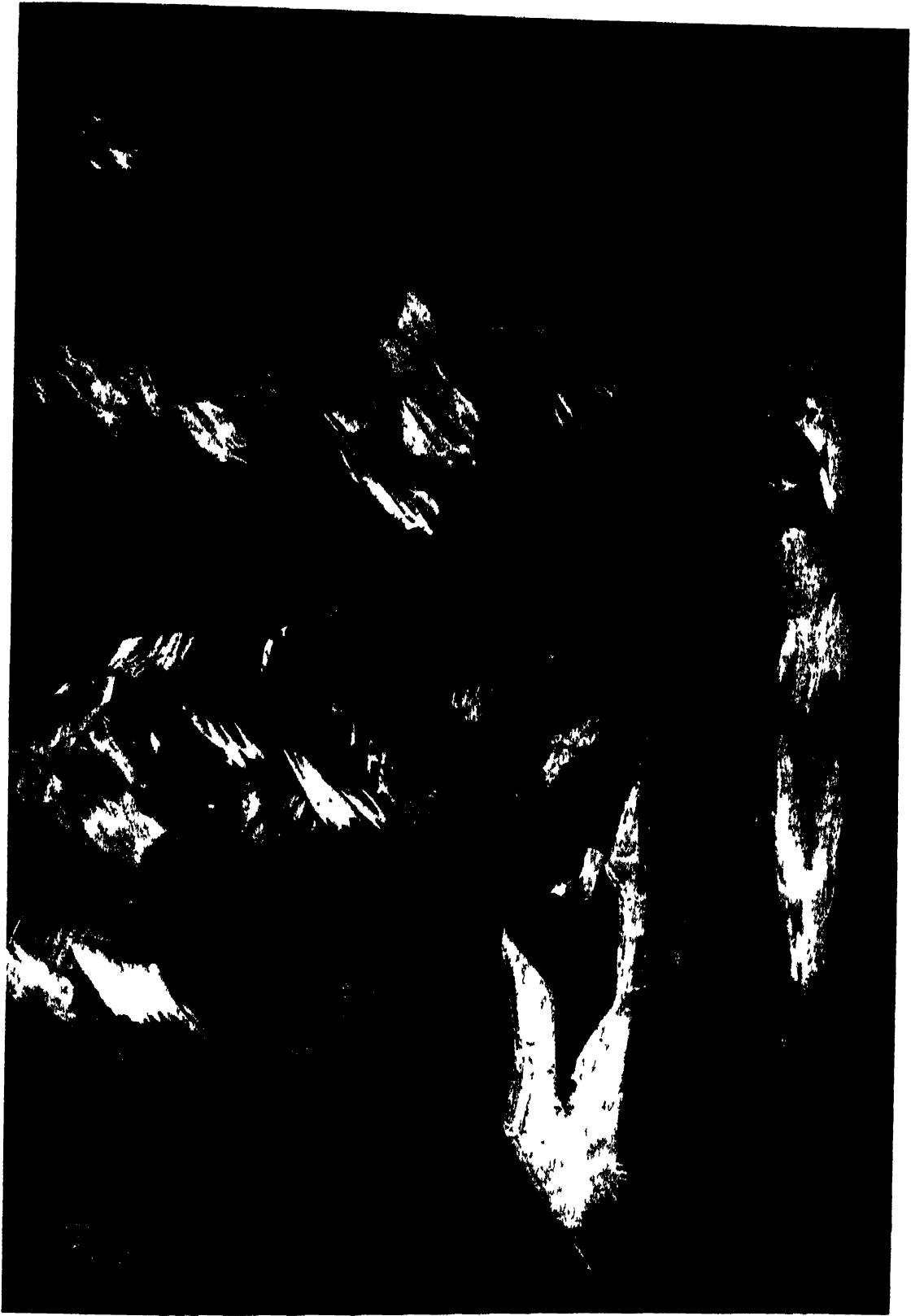


FIG 75 K KOROVIN. SCENERY FOR "LA SIBÉRIE"







Fig. 76. KOROVIN: "KHOVANTSCHINA"

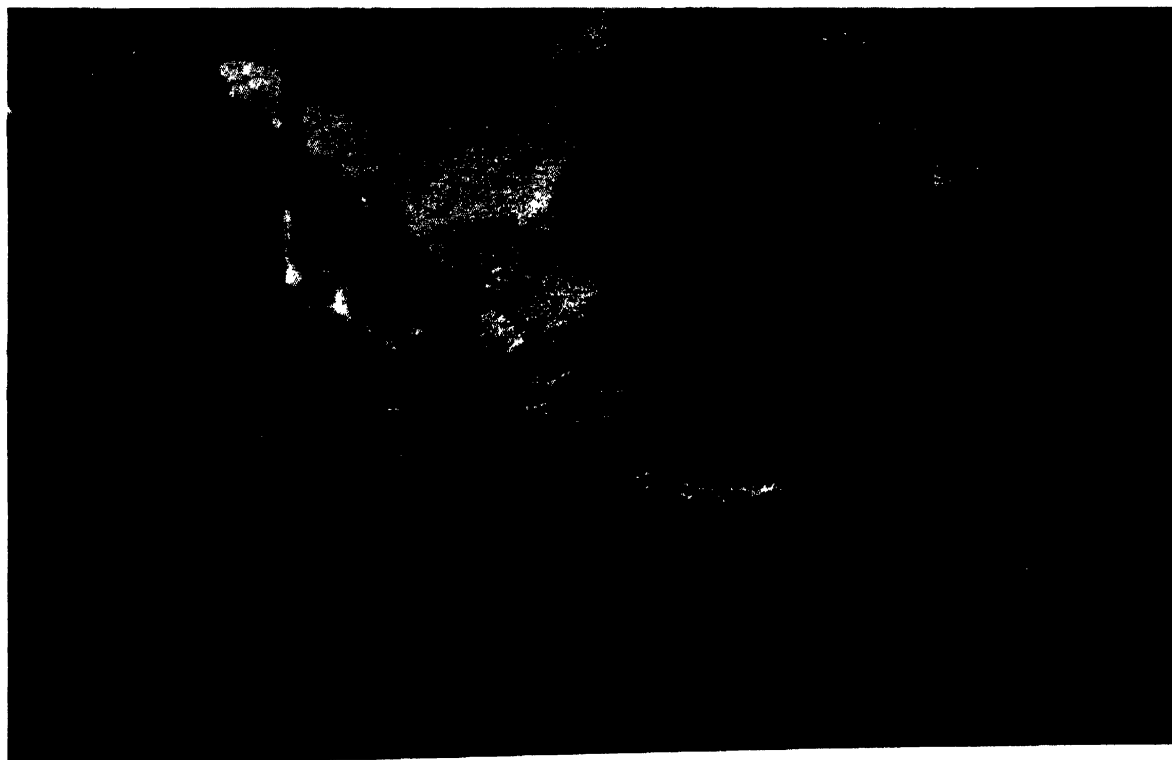


Fig. 77. KOROVIN: "THE CORSAIR"





Figs. 78, 79. KOROVIN: FIGURE STUDIES



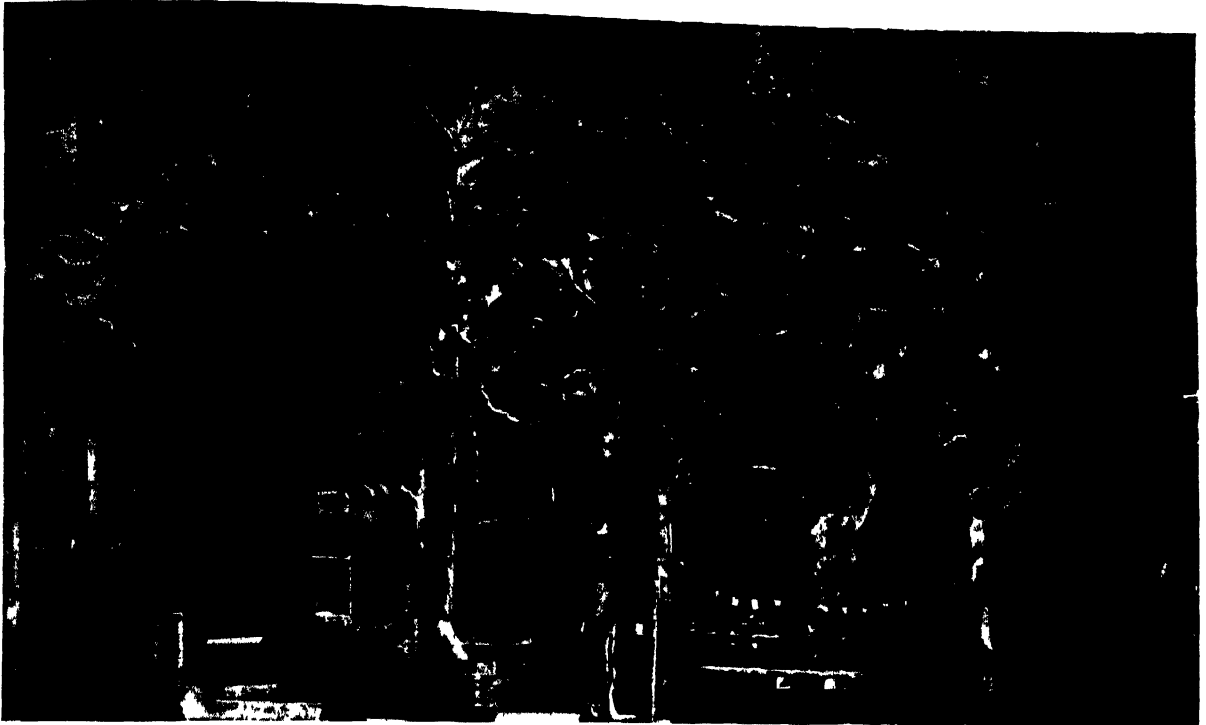


Fig. 80. SCENE FROM "THREE SISTERS," ACT IV  
*Model in the museum of the Art Theatre, Moscow*

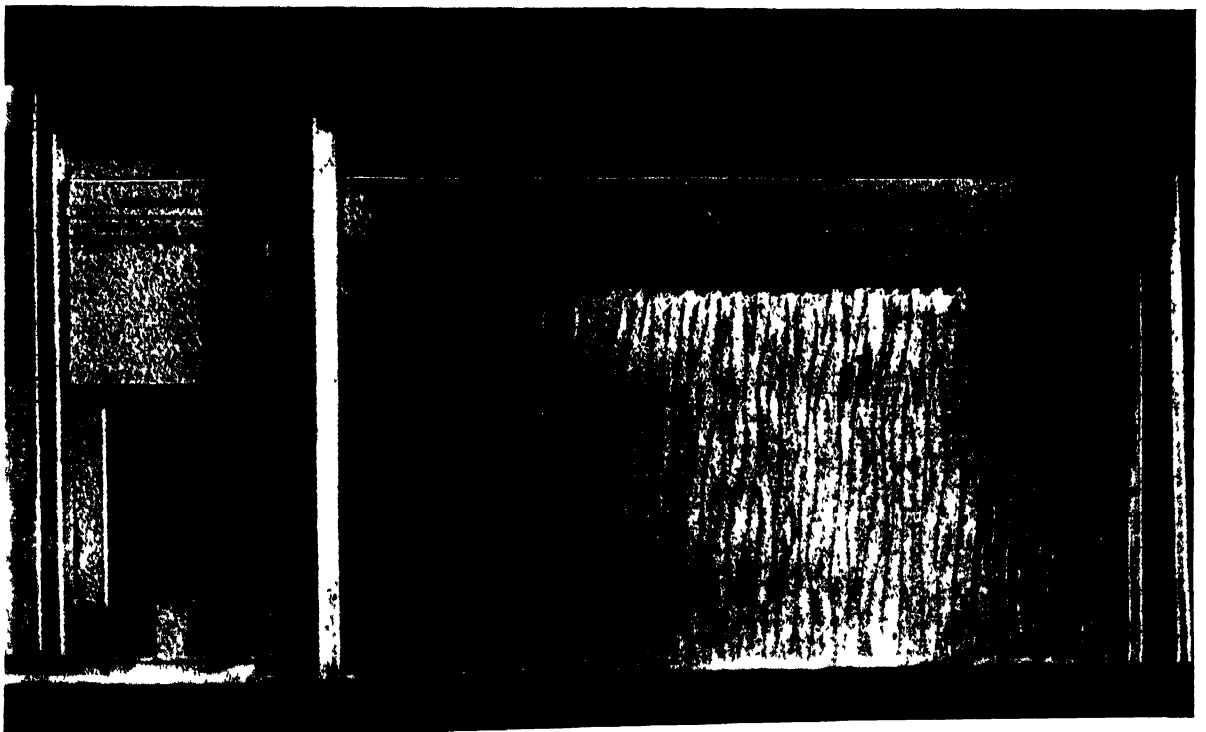


Fig. 81. SCENE FROM "THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV"  
*Model in the museum of the Art Theatre, Moscow*



# THE RUSSIAN BALLET: LÉON BAKST







Fig 83 BAKST SCENERY FOR "HÉLÈNE DE SPARTE"

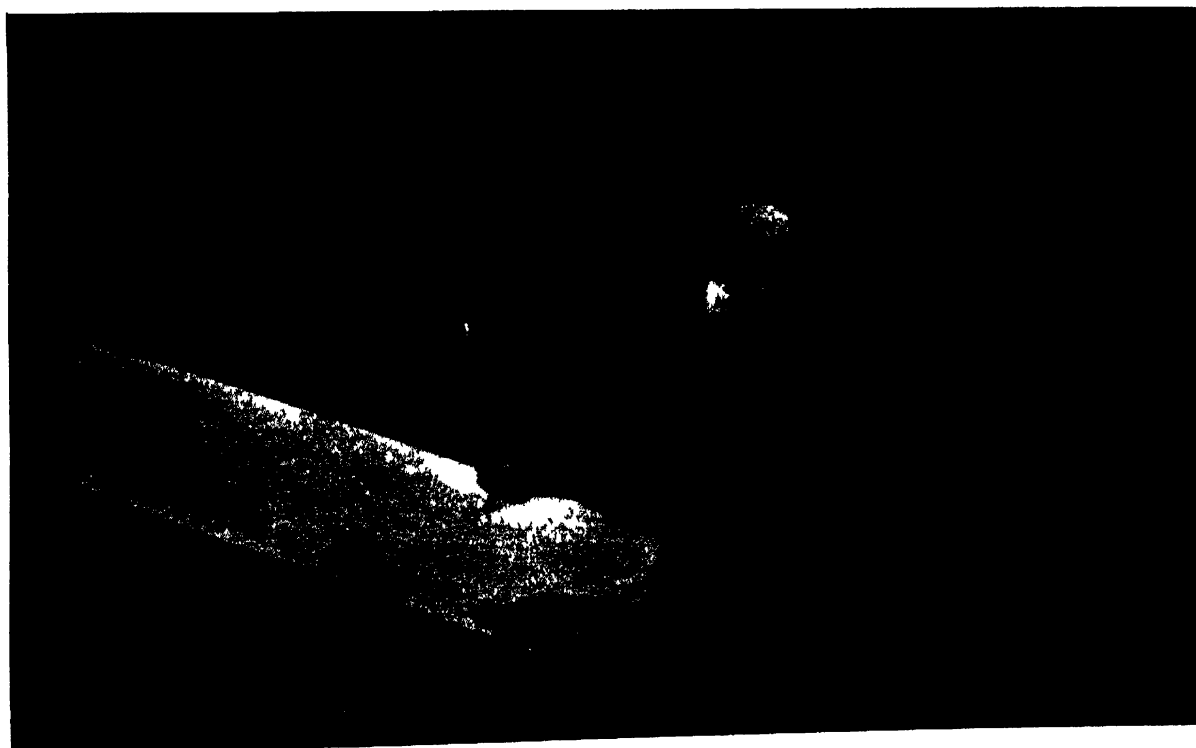


Fig 82 LÉON BAKST  
*Photo by Choumov*





Fig 85. BAKST "THE FAUN" (NIIJINSKY)



Fig 84 BAKST COSTUME FOR POLLUX IN "HÉLÈNE DE SPARTE"



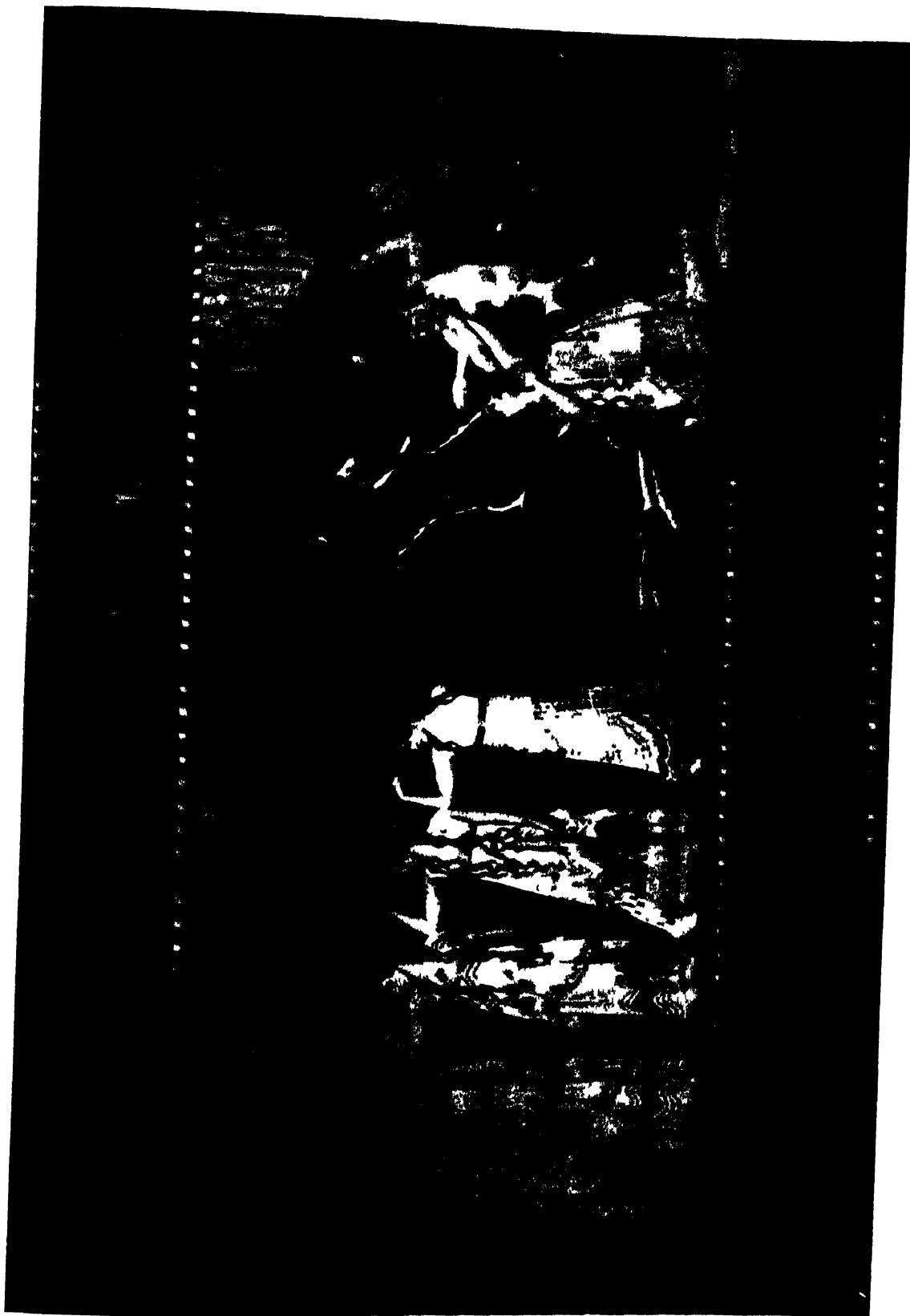


Fig 80 BAKST GROUP FROM "L'APRÈS-MIDI D'UN FAUNE"





Fig 87. BAKST: "DAPHNIS ET CHLOE"







Fig 88 BAKST SCENERY FOR "S. SÉBASTIEN"



Fig. 89. BAKST SCENERY FOR "S. SÉBASTIEN"





Fig 90 BARST "S SÉBASTIEN"





Fig 91 BAKST FIGURE STUDY FOR "S SÉBASTIEN"





Forté  
M. de  
M. de







Fig 94 BAKST PALACE SCENE FROM "THE SLEEPING PRINCESS"



Fig. 95. BAKST. FIGURE STUDY OF A PAGE FROM "THE SLEEPING PRINCESS"

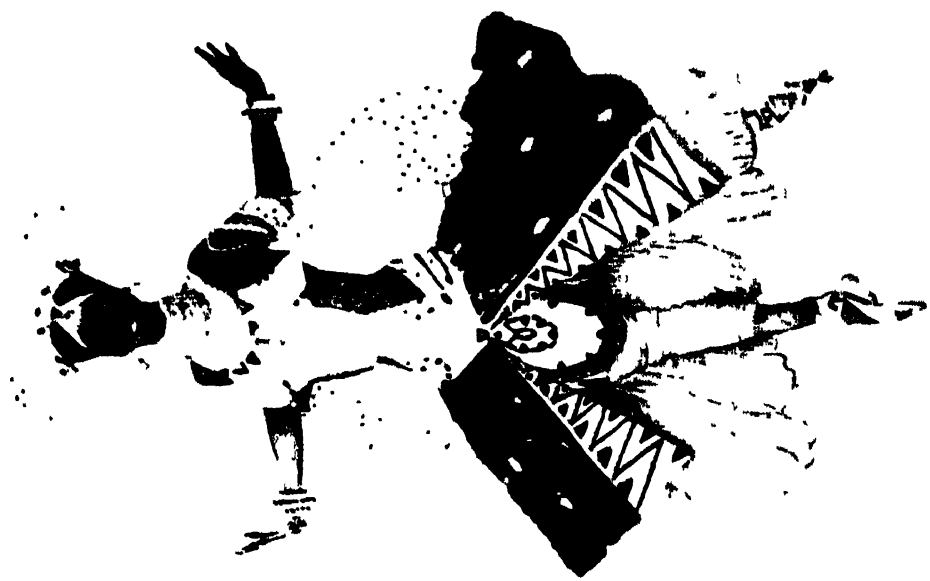


Fig 96. BAKST. FIGURE STUDY FOR A BALLET





Fig. 97. BAKST: NEGRO SLAVE.





Fig. 98. BAKST: "MODERN DRESS": CARICATURE

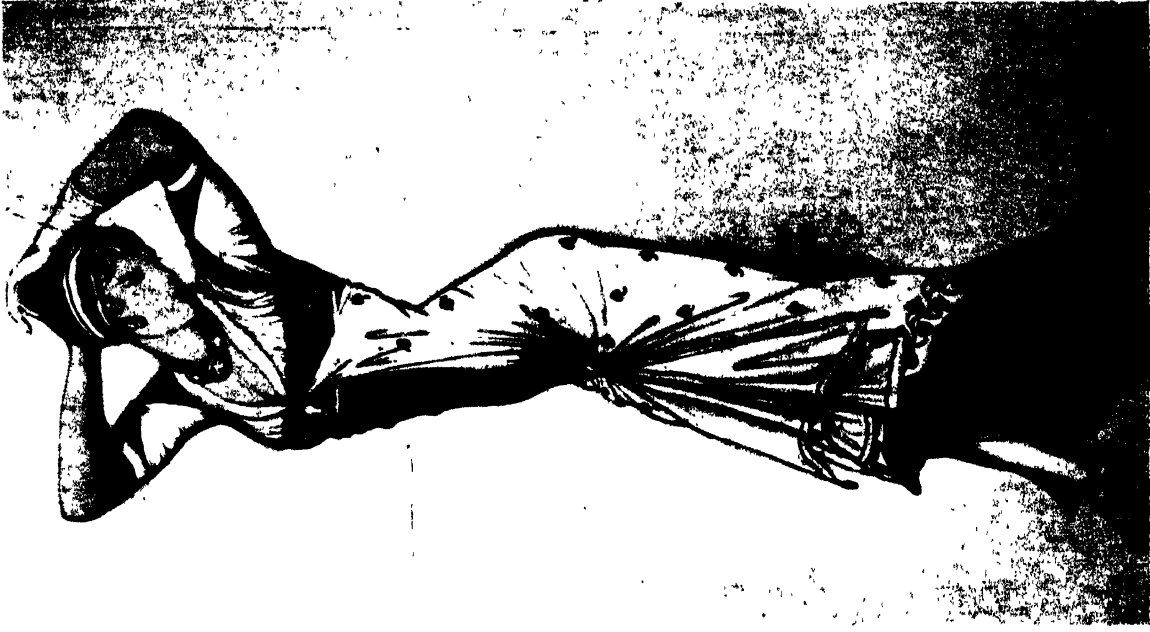


Fig. 99. BAKST: COSTUME DESIGN



Fig. 100. BAKST: COSTUME DESIGN FOR SCHAHRIAR IN "SCHÉHÉRÉZADE"



Fig 101. BAKST COSTUME DESIGN FOR SHAH ZEMAN IN "SCHÉHÉRÉZADE"





Fig 102 BAKST FIGURE STUDIES FOR ' L'OISEAU DE FER '

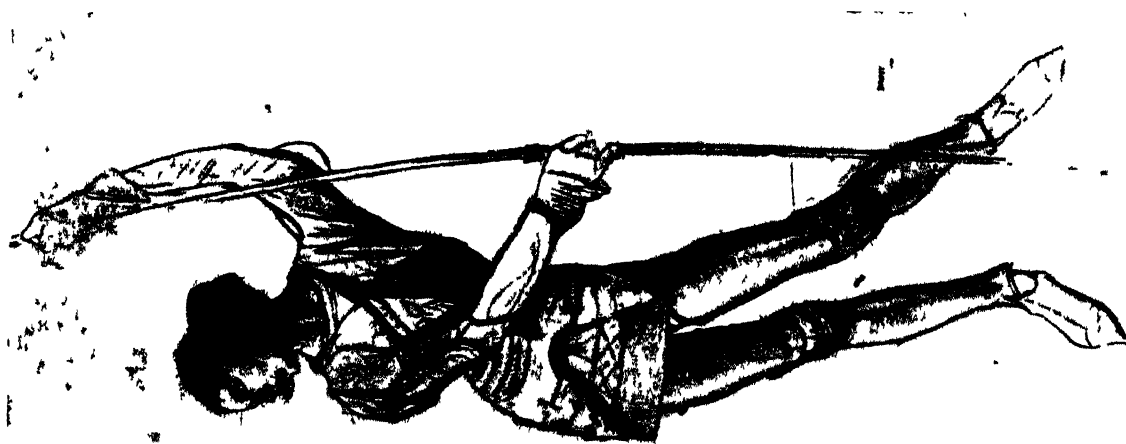


Fig 103 BAKST IDA RUBINSTEIN AS " S SÉBASTIEN "



Fig 104 STRAVINSKY (SEATED), LAPINOV, AND BAKST



## **THE RUSSIAN BALLET: PERFORMERS**





Fig 105 STUDY FOR A BALLET  
*The Imperial Theatre Annual 1891*



Fig 106 "LES SYLPHIDES", Paris



Fig 108. Nijinsky, THE DANCER

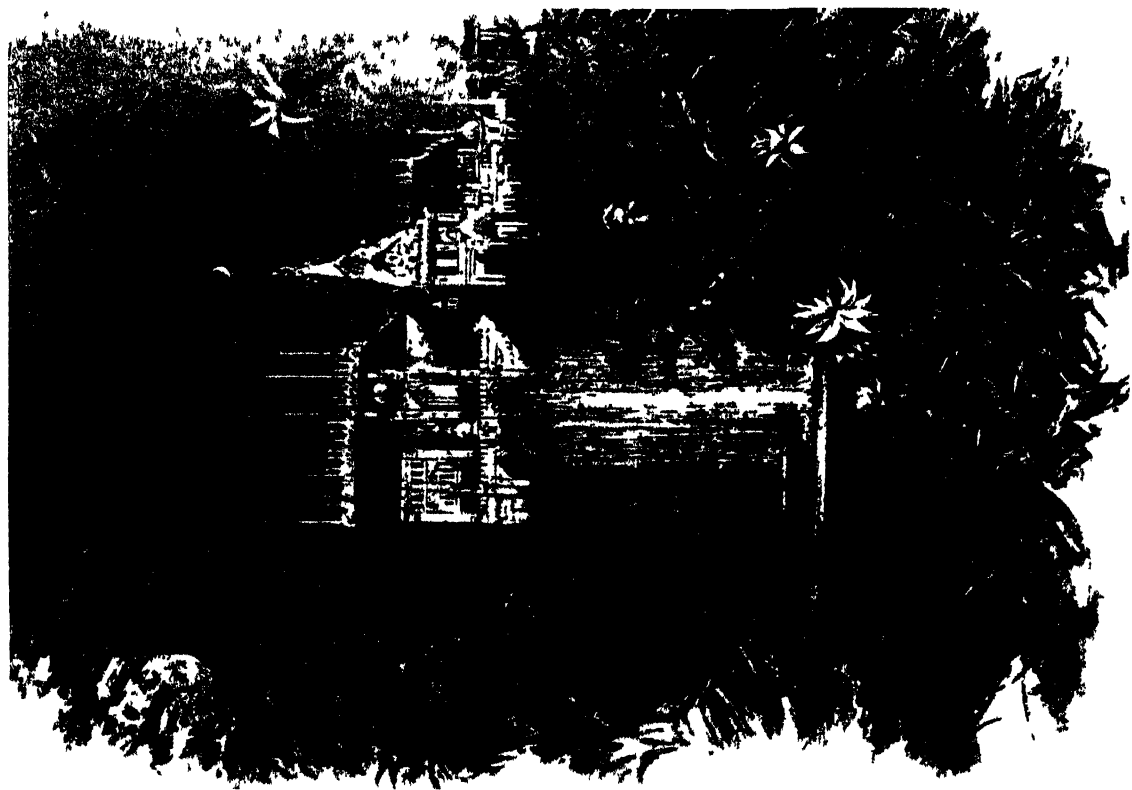


Fig 107 FANTASTIC SCENE FOR A BALLET BY SAINT-LÉON  
Court Theatre, 1895-96



Fig 109 NIINSKY IN "DANSE SIAMOISE"  
*Photo Librairie de France*



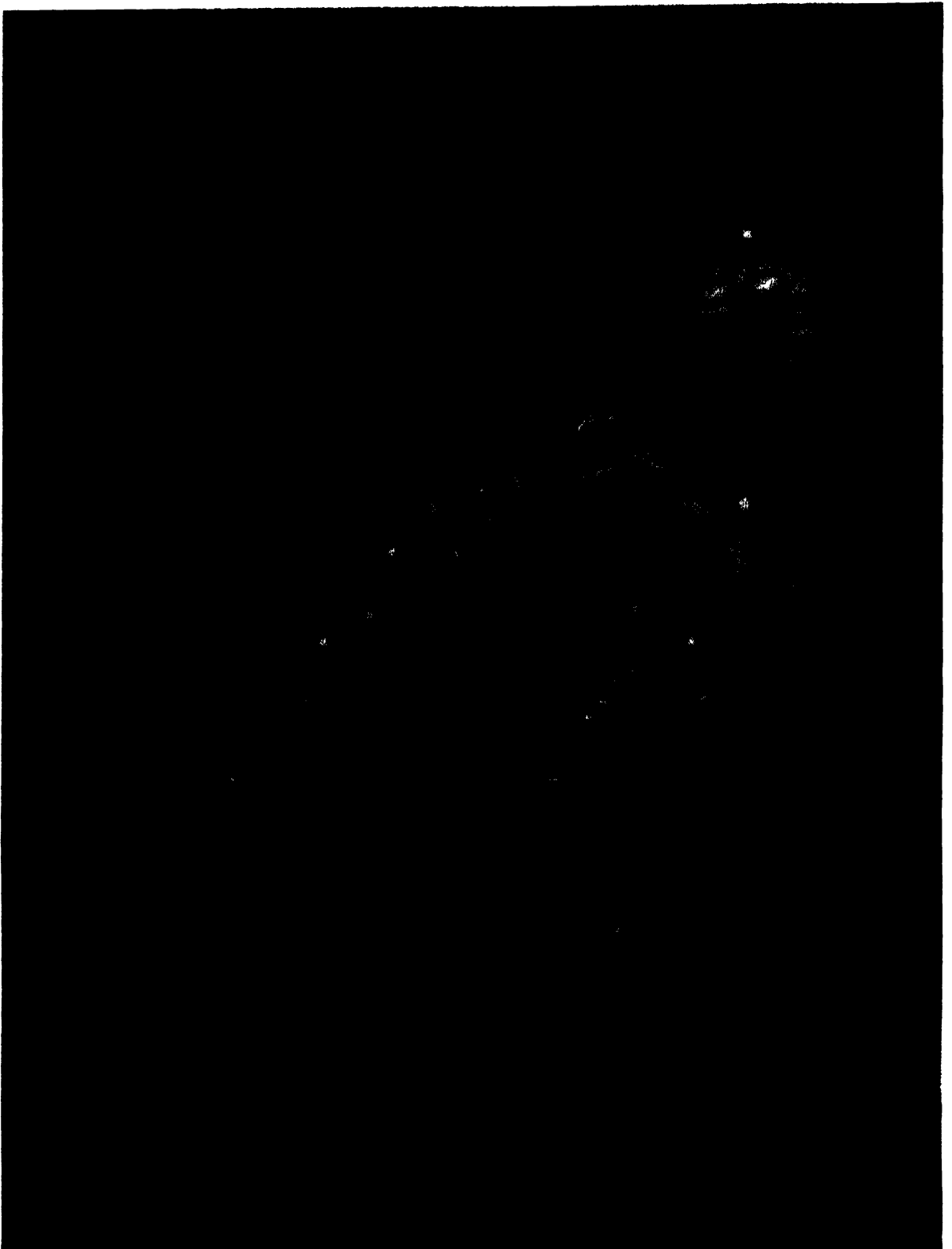


Fig. 110 NIJINSKY IN "DANSE SIAMOISE"  
*Photo Librairie de France*



Fig 111 NIJINSKY IN DANSE SIAMOISE  
*Photo Librairie de France*



Fig 112 IDA RUBINSTEIN  
*Photo L'brarie de France*



FIG 113 M FOKIN AND VERA FOKINA IN "LE CARNAVAL"



Fig 114 KARSAVINA  
*Portrait by Goncharova*  
*National Library, Vienna*

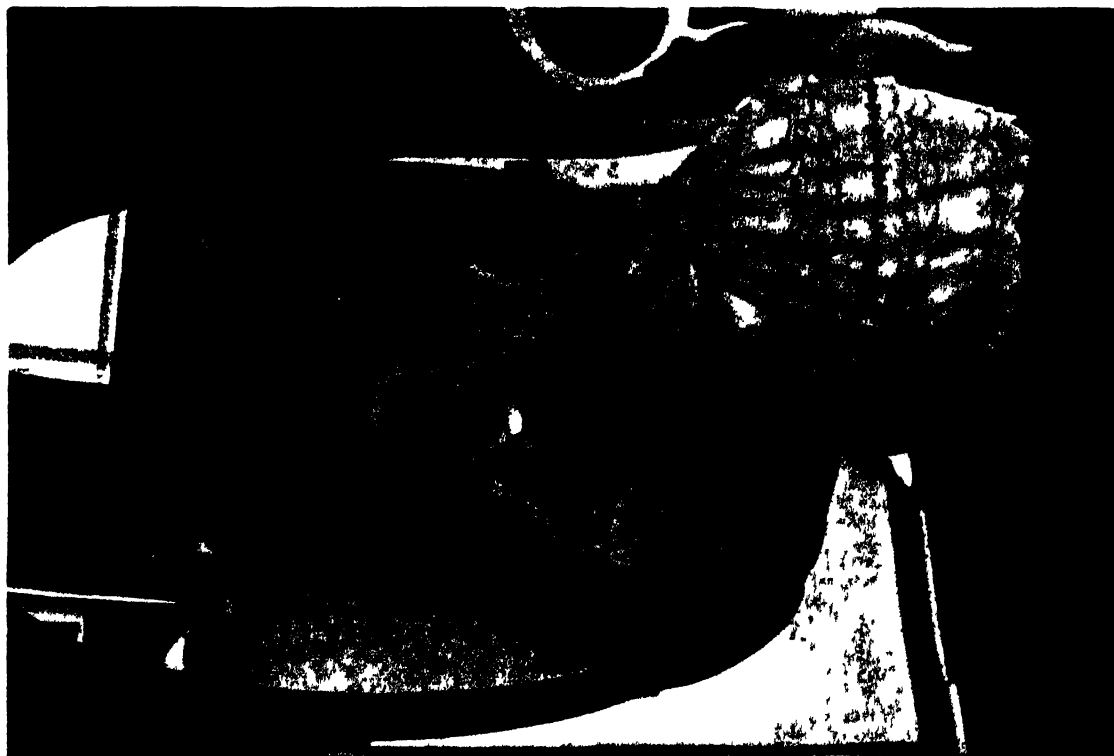


Fig 115 KARSAVINA AS COLUMBINE IN "LE CARNAVAL"



Fig 116 KARSAVINA AND MASSIN IN "THE GOOD-HUMoured LADIES" (1920)

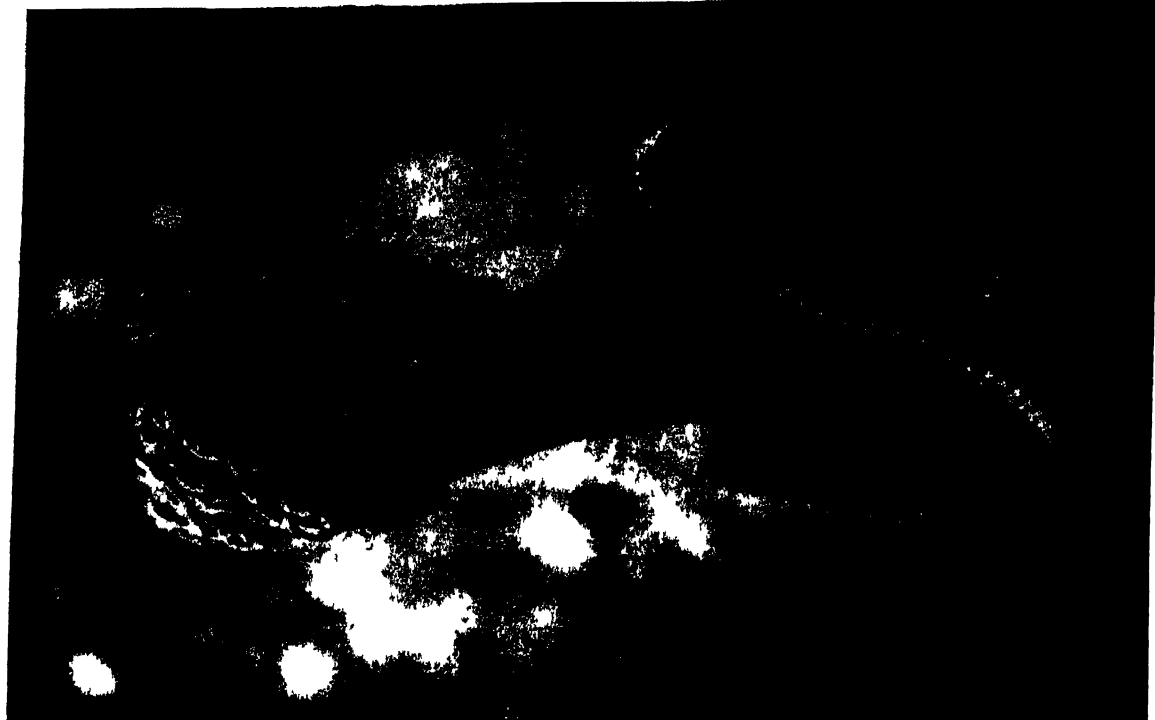
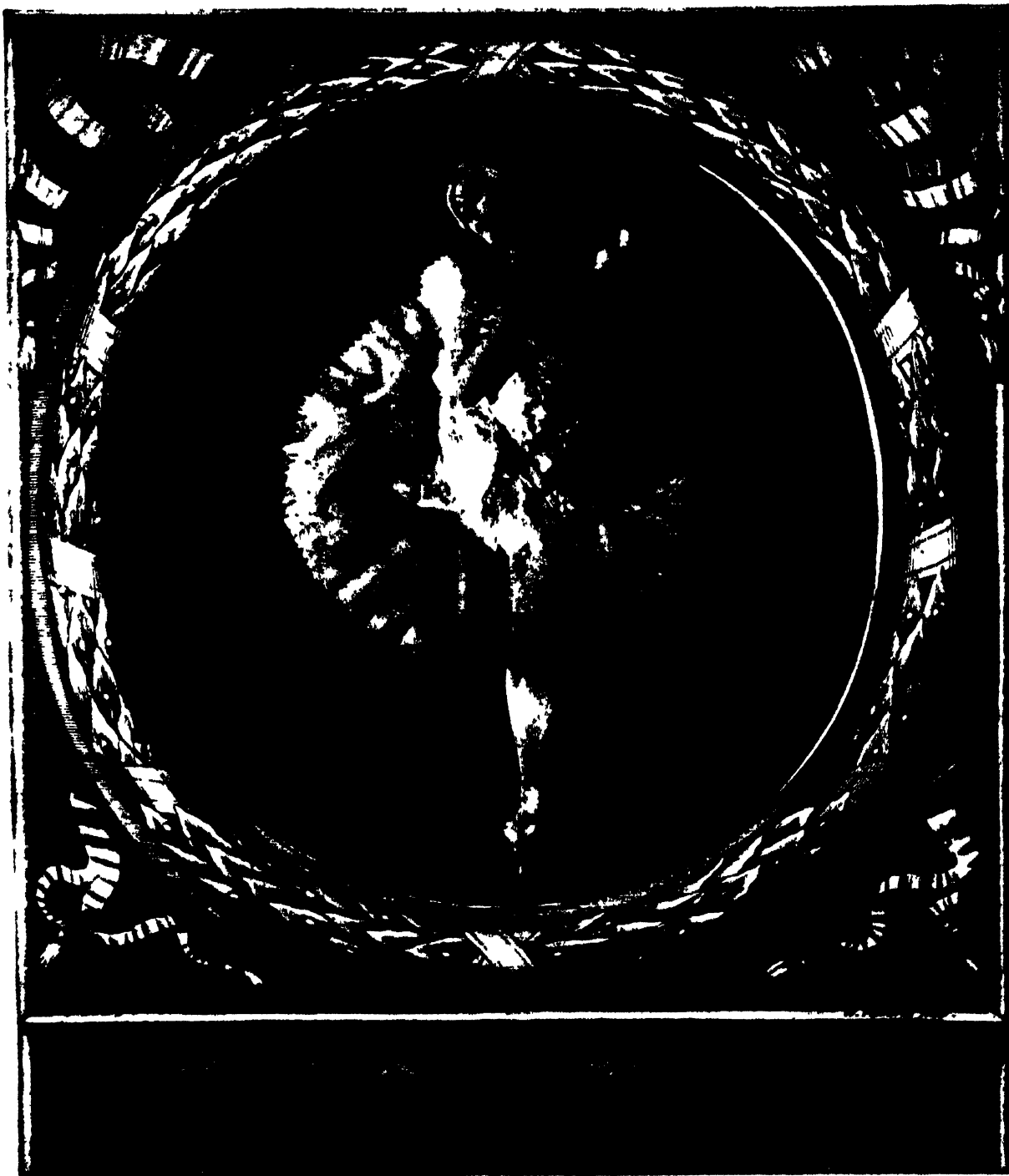


Fig 117 KARSAYINA IN "LE ROSSIGNOL" (1920)



*Uche Strelki*  
 P. G. Bibliotèque Nationale de Vienne  
 Avec mon plus grand estime  
 Anna Pavlova 1927.

Fig 119 ANNA PAVLOVA





Fig. 120. VERA NEMCHINOVA

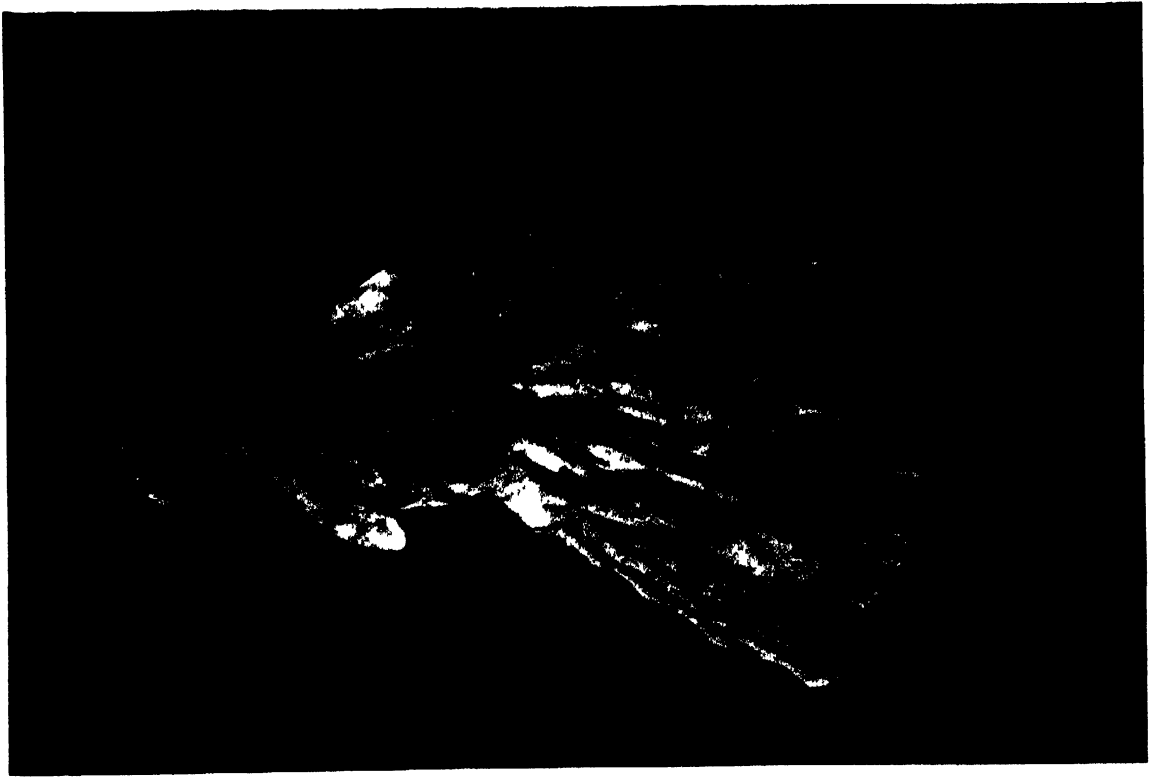


Fig. 121. NEMCHINOVA IN "LE CARNAVAL"

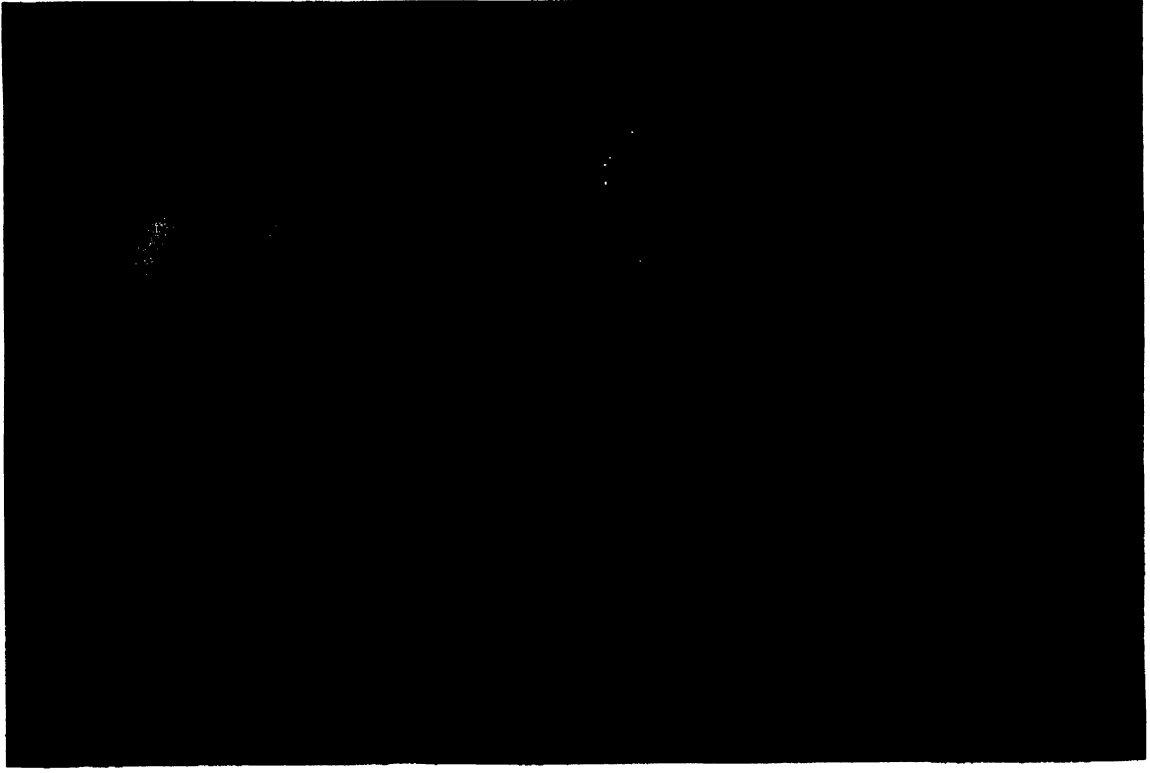


Fig. 122. NEMCHINOVA  
*Photo by Choumou*



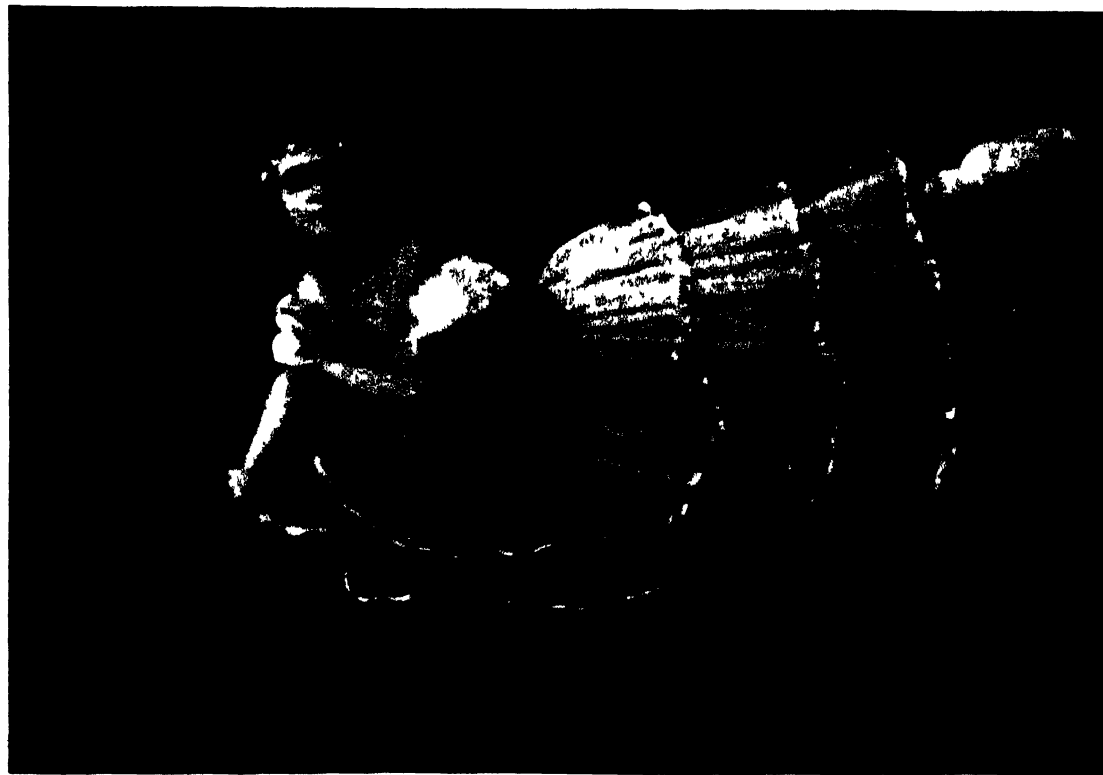


Fig 125 MARIE BOLDIREV  
Photo by Choumou



Fig 126. NEMCHINOVA AND N. ZAEREV IN "LE CARNAVAL"



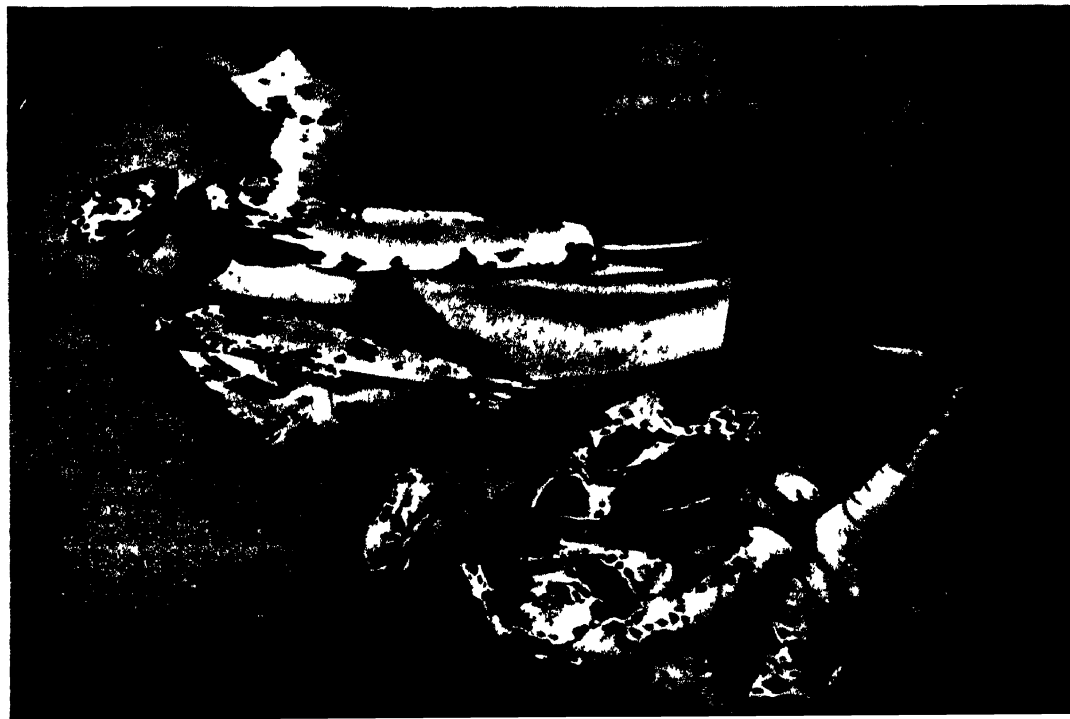
Fig. 127 OLGA SPASSIVA Grand Opera, Paris  
*Photo by Choumov*



Fig. 128. WOIZIKOVSKY



Fig. 129. SPESSIVA AND SERGE LIFAR IN 'THE CAT'



130. TCHERNICHEVA AND LIFAR IN "LE PAS D'ACIER," BY S PROKOVIEV AND  
I. SAKULOV

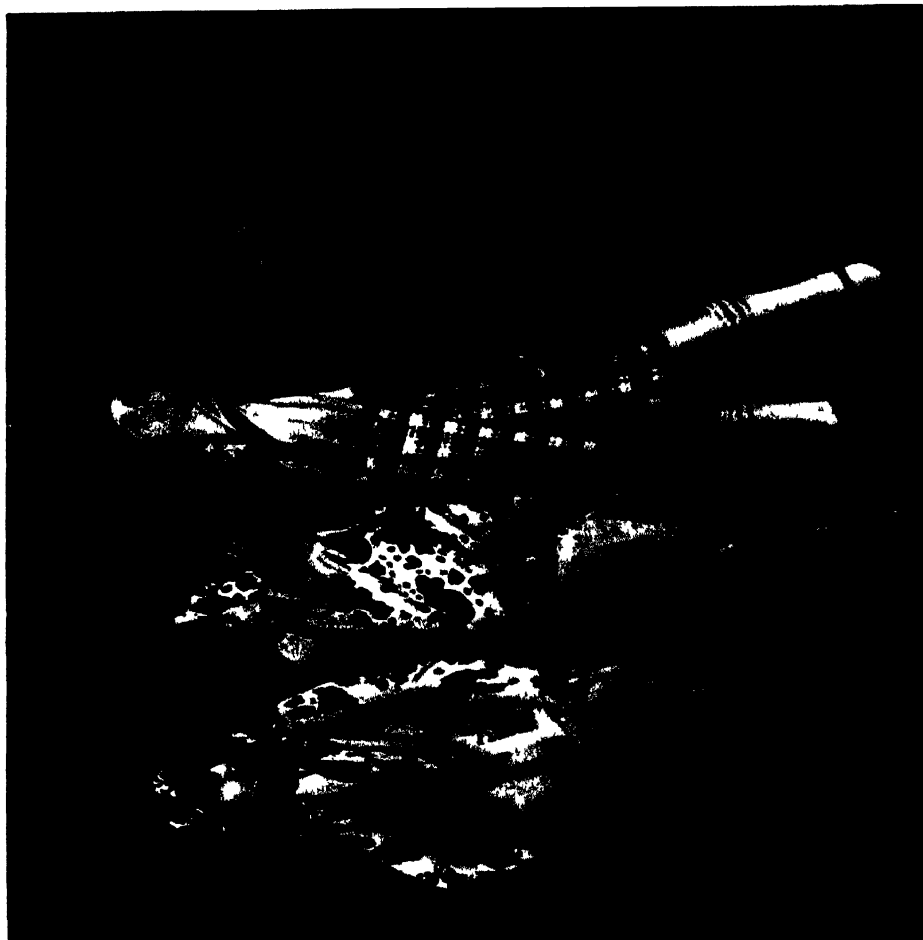


Fig. 131. MASSIN AND LIFAR. A. DANILOVA, AND TCHERNICHEVA, IN LARIONOV'S  
"PAS D'ACIER"



Fig 132 GONCHAROVA FIGURE STUDY FOR "LITURGIE"





## THE RUSSIAN BALLET: BAKST'S SUCCESSORS





Fig 133 DEATH OF THE VIRGIN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY, MOSCOW



Fig 134 COD. SLAV. 6, GOSPELS, FOL 115V  
*National Library, Vienna*

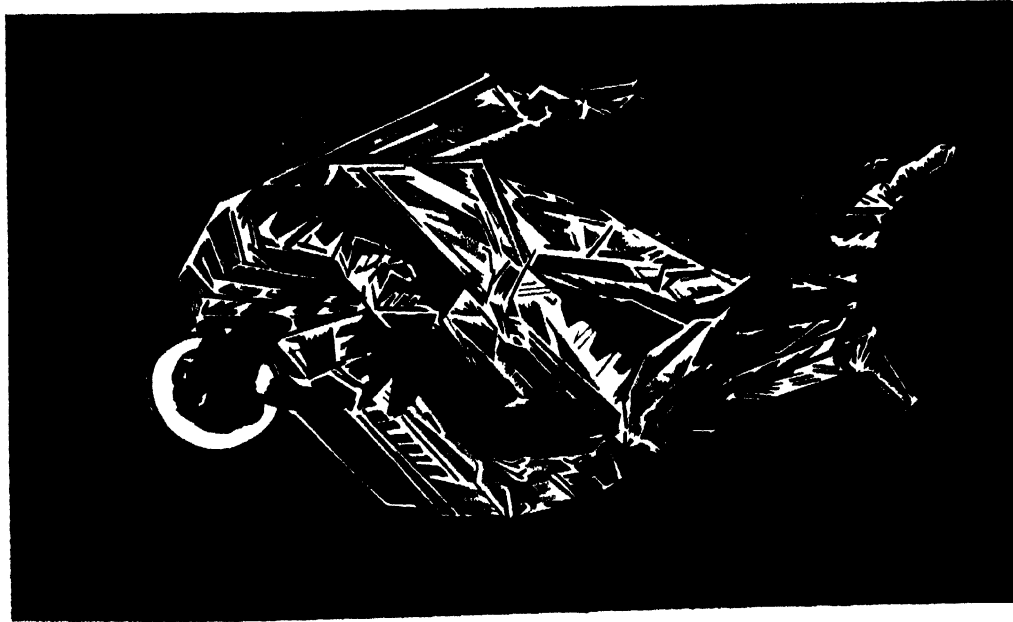


Fig 135 GONCHAROVA FIGURE STUDY



Fig 136 GONCHAROVA FIGURE STUDY



ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ ΤΟΥ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΙΩΑΝΝΗ ΤΟ ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ



Fig 137: SUPPL GREC 12<sup>N</sup>, FOL 1b  
St John the Baptist dictating the Gospel at God's command  
National Library Vienna

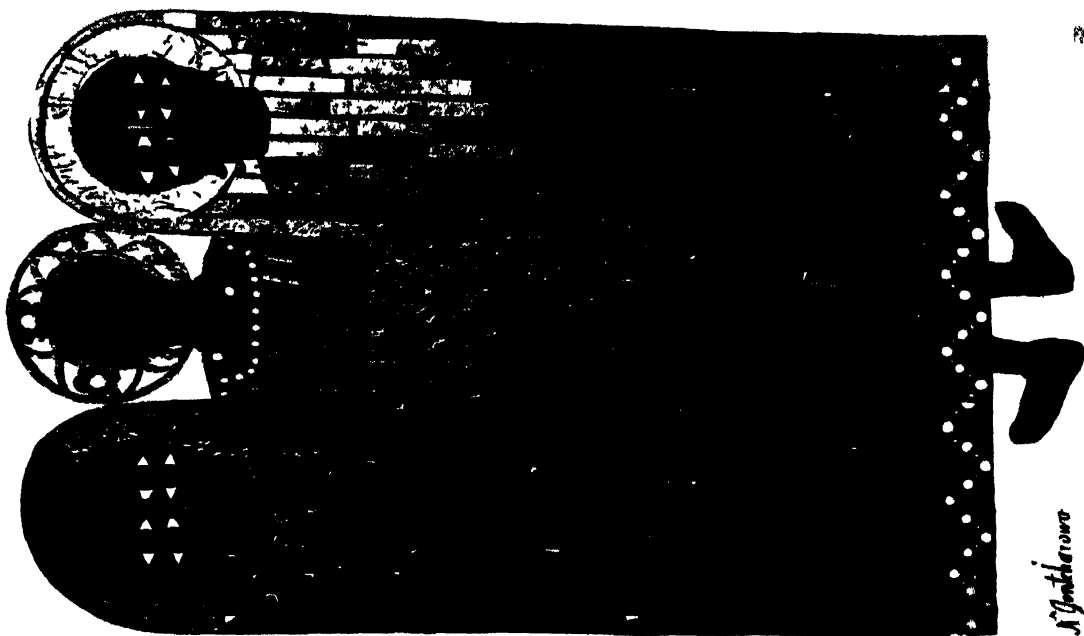


Fig 138: GONCHAROVA COSTUME DESIGN FOR "LITURGIE"







Fig 139 GONCHAROVA COSTUME OF THE MIDDLE AGES



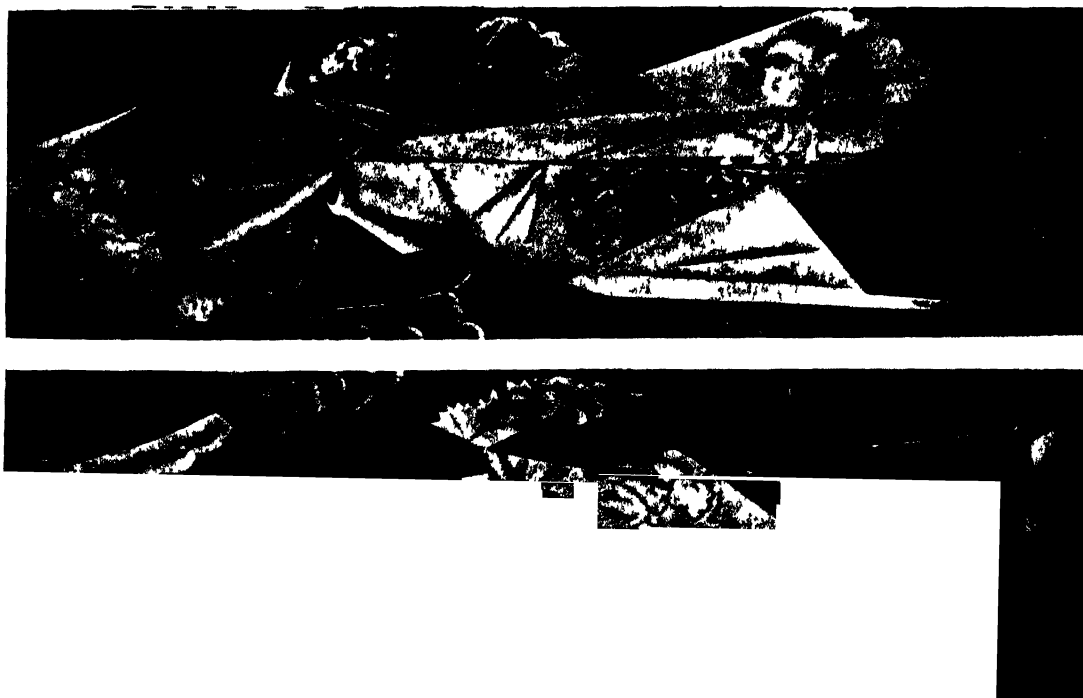


Fig 140 GONCHAROVA COSTUME STUDY SPANISH WOMEN

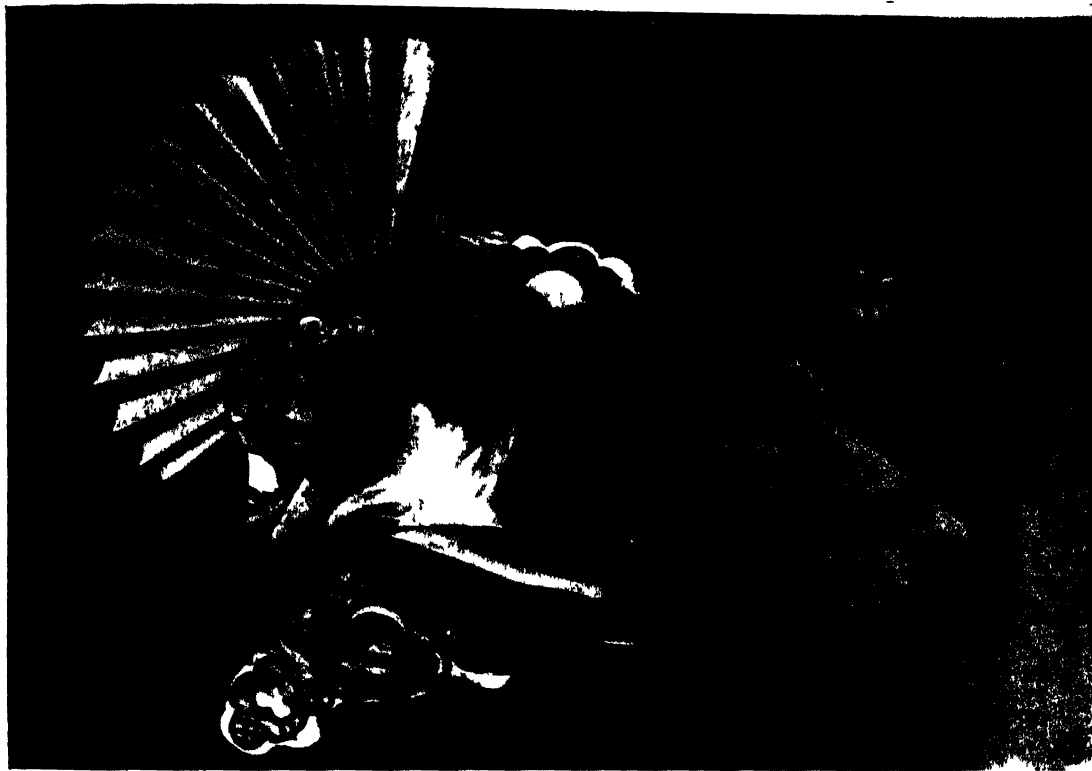


Fig 141 GONCHAROVA: SPANISH COSTUME

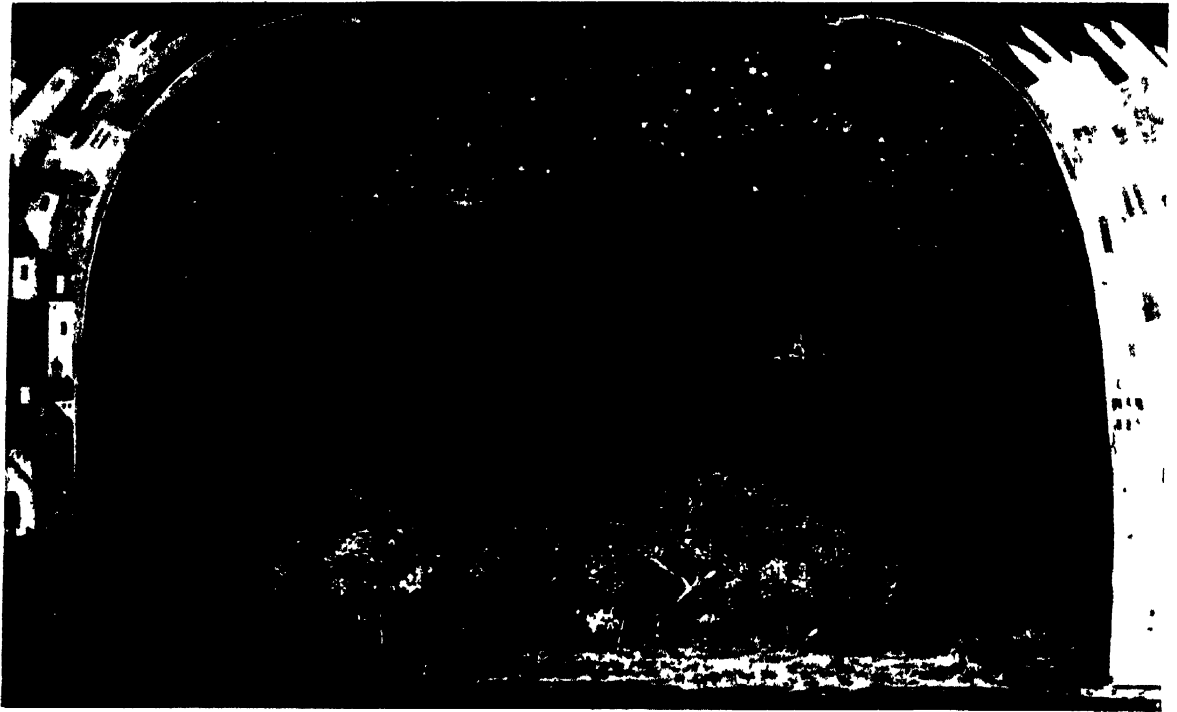


Fig. 142. GONCHAROVA: SCENE FROM "L'OISEAU DE FEU" (1926)

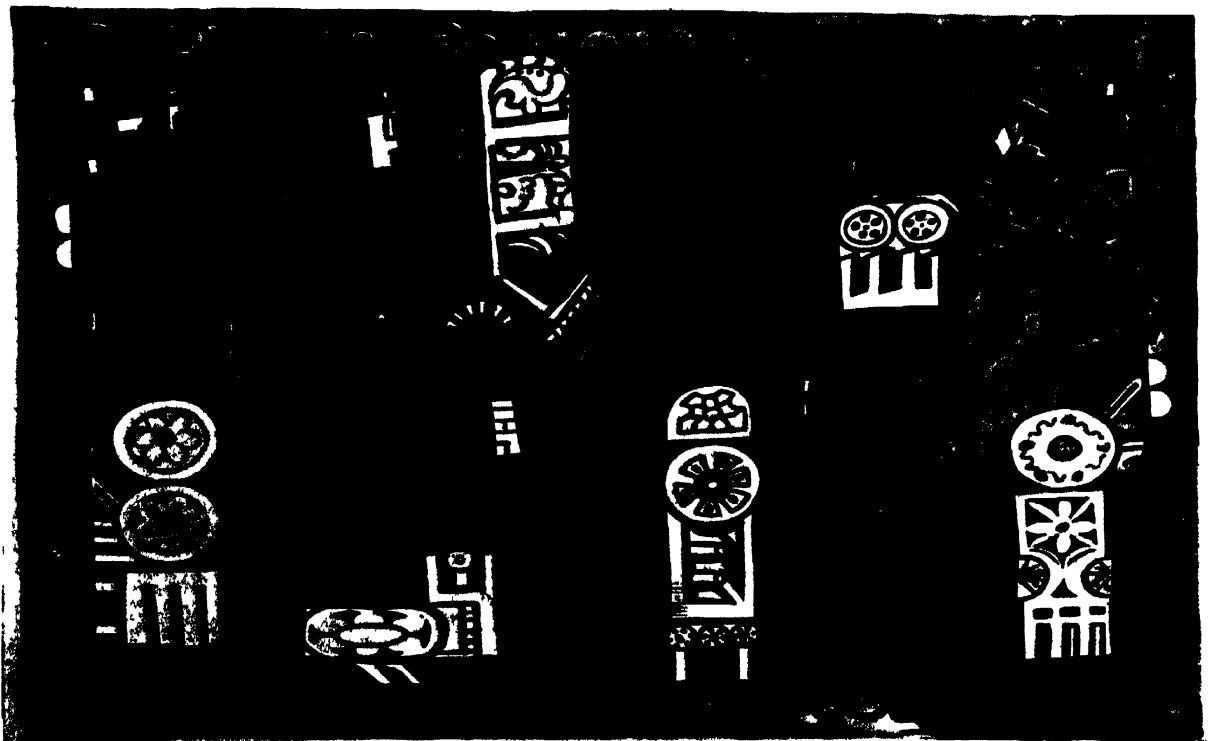


Fig. 143. GONCHAROVA: CURTAIN FOR "L'OISEAU DE FEU"

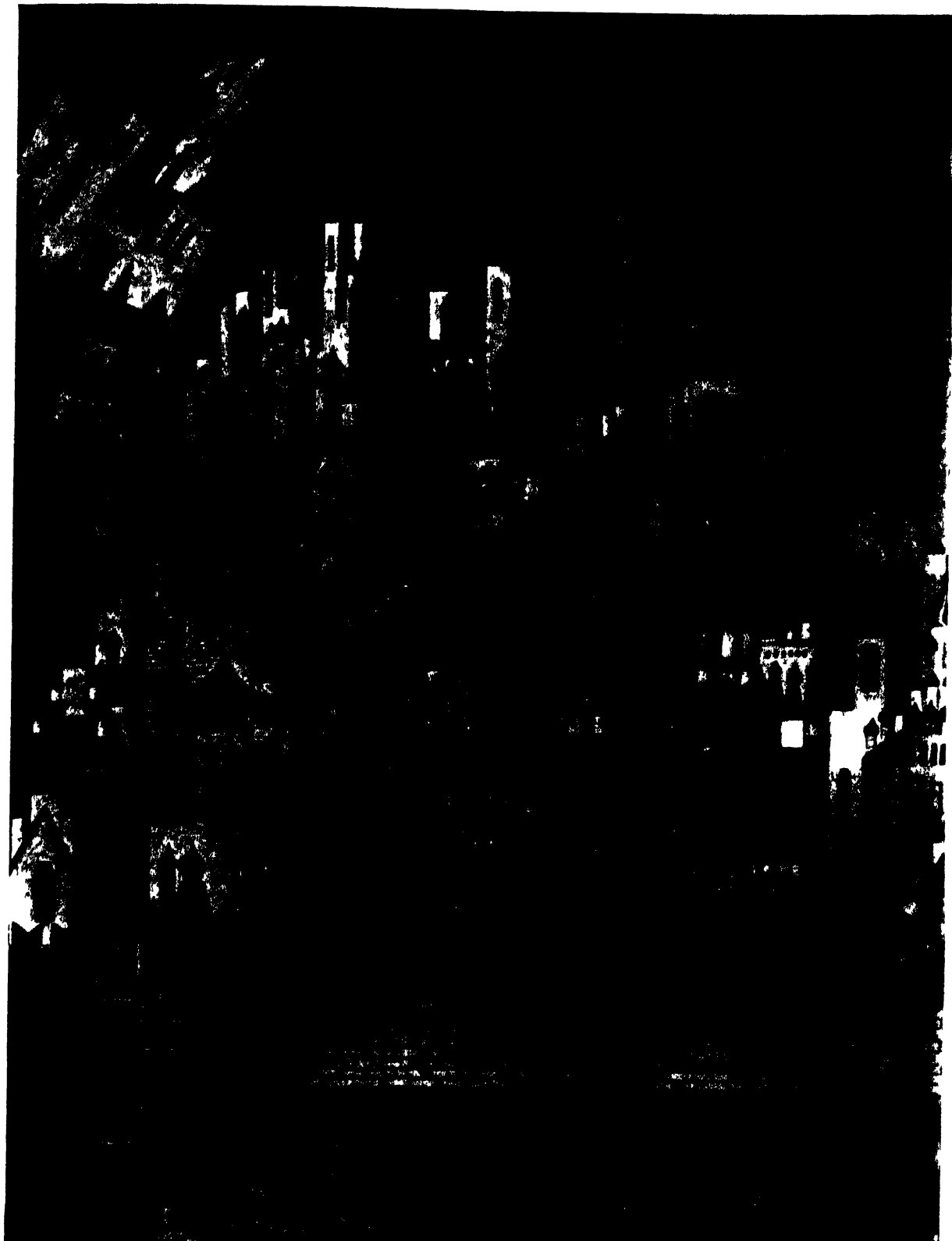


Fig. 144 GONCHAROVA: SCENERY FOR "L'OISEAU DE FEU," ACT II

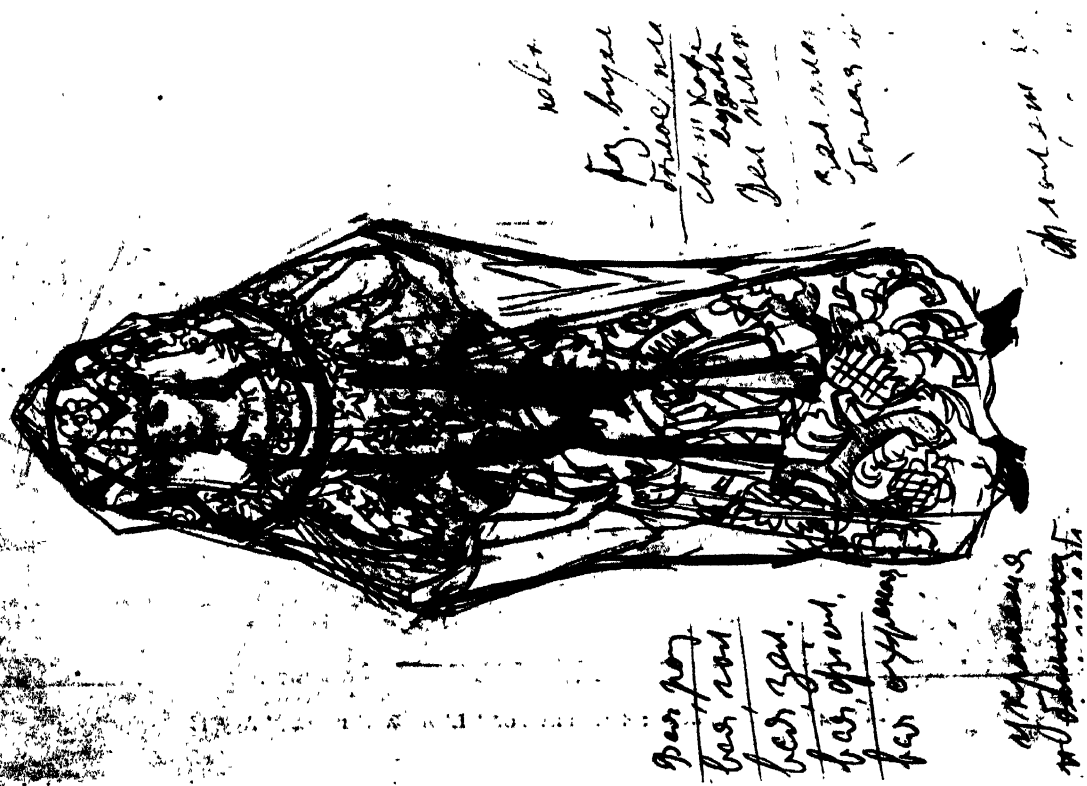




Fig 148 GONCHAROVA CAUCASIAN COSTUME



Fig 147 GONCHAROVA COSTUME DESIGN FOR L'OISEAU DE FEU



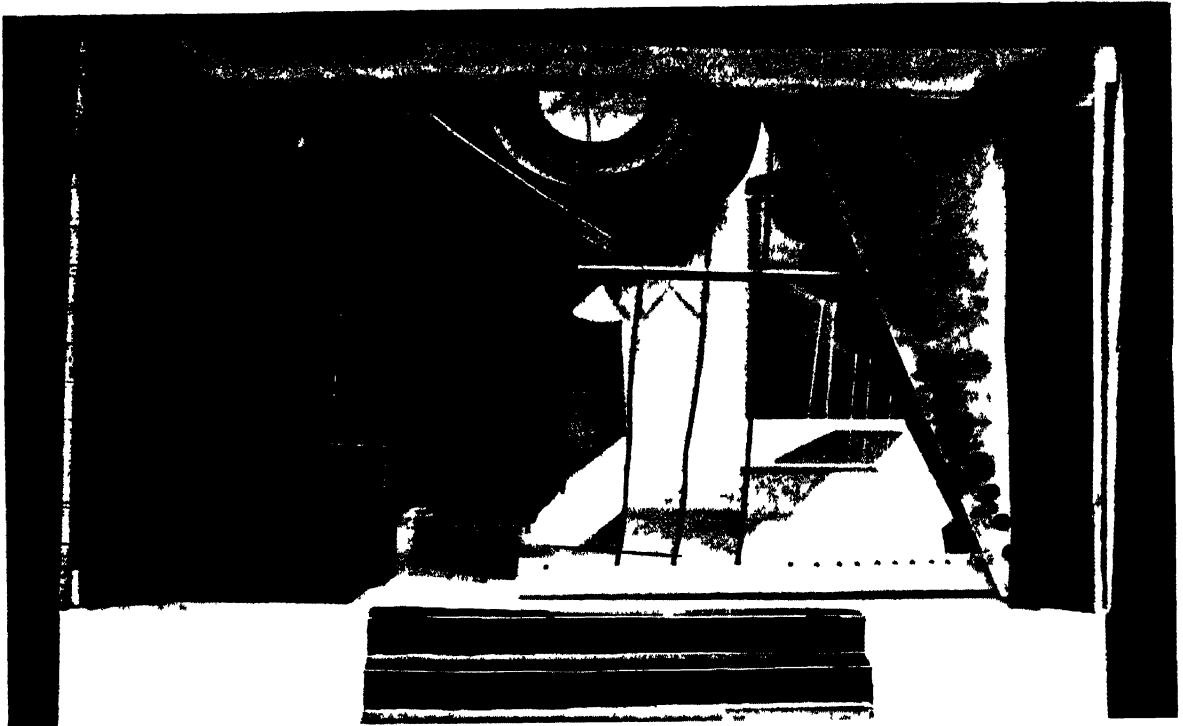


Fig 149 GONCHAROVA SCENE FROM "LT CIOCHIR"  
Constructivist setting of different materials (glass canvas tin etc.)



Fig 150 GONCHAROVA SCENERY FOR "L'OISEAU BLEU"



Fig. 151. GONCHAROVA: "LE COQ D'OR," ACT III





Fig 152 GONCHAROVA BALL FROM RHAPSODY



Fig 153 PAVLOVA  
Photo by Choumou



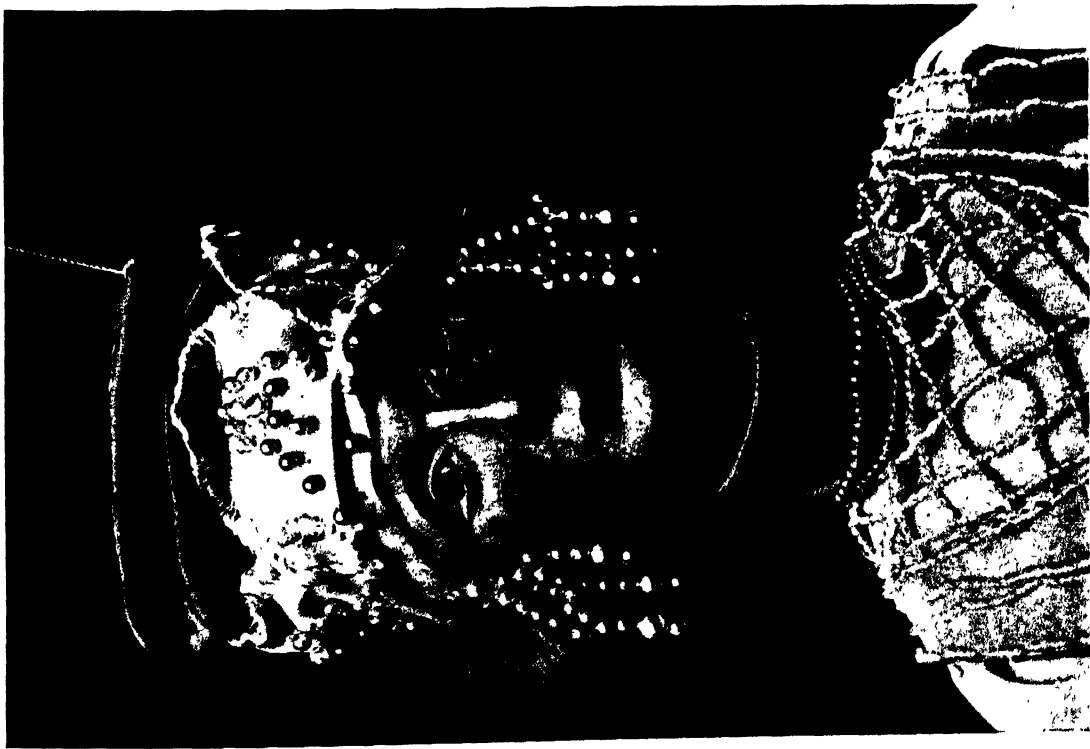


Fig. 155. GONCHAROVA: MARIONETTE

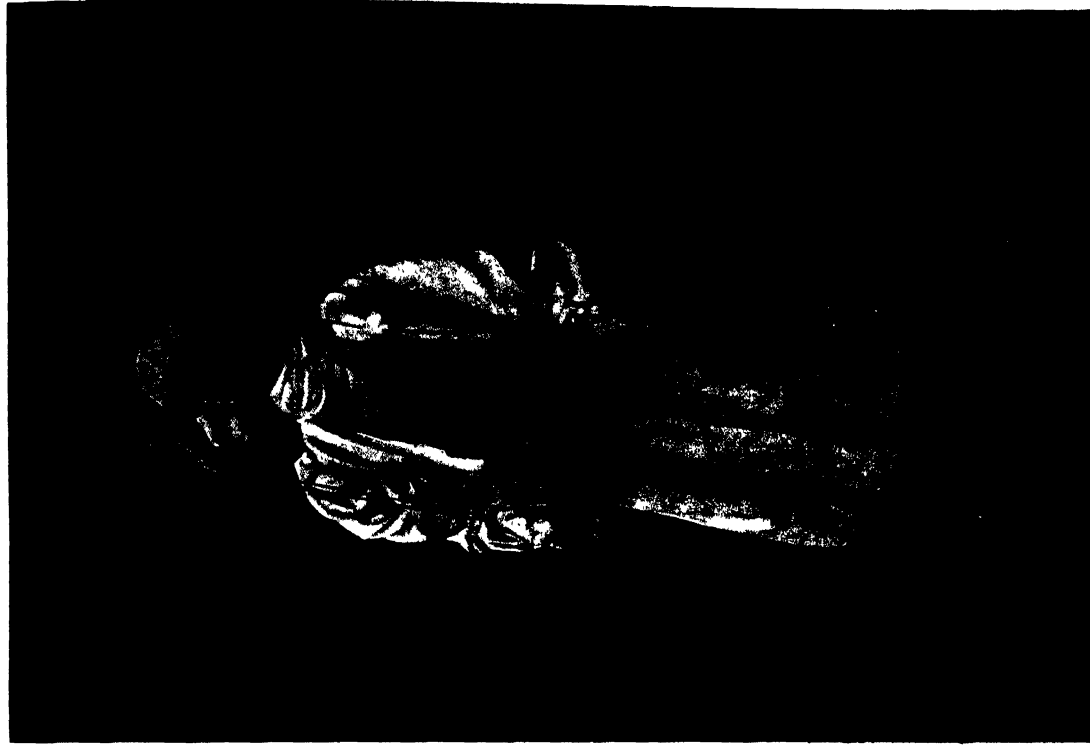


Fig. 156. GONCHAROVA: MARIONETTE



Fig 157 GONCHAROVA MARIONETTE

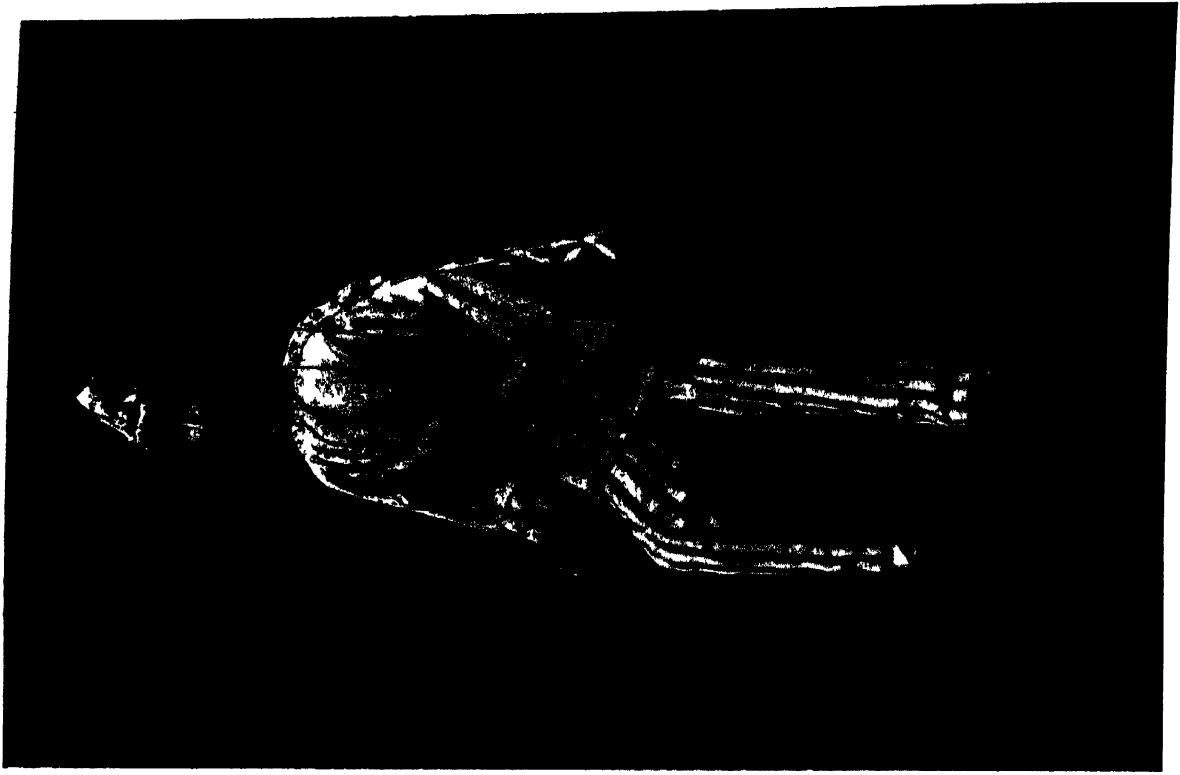


Fig 158 GONCHAROVA MARIONETTE

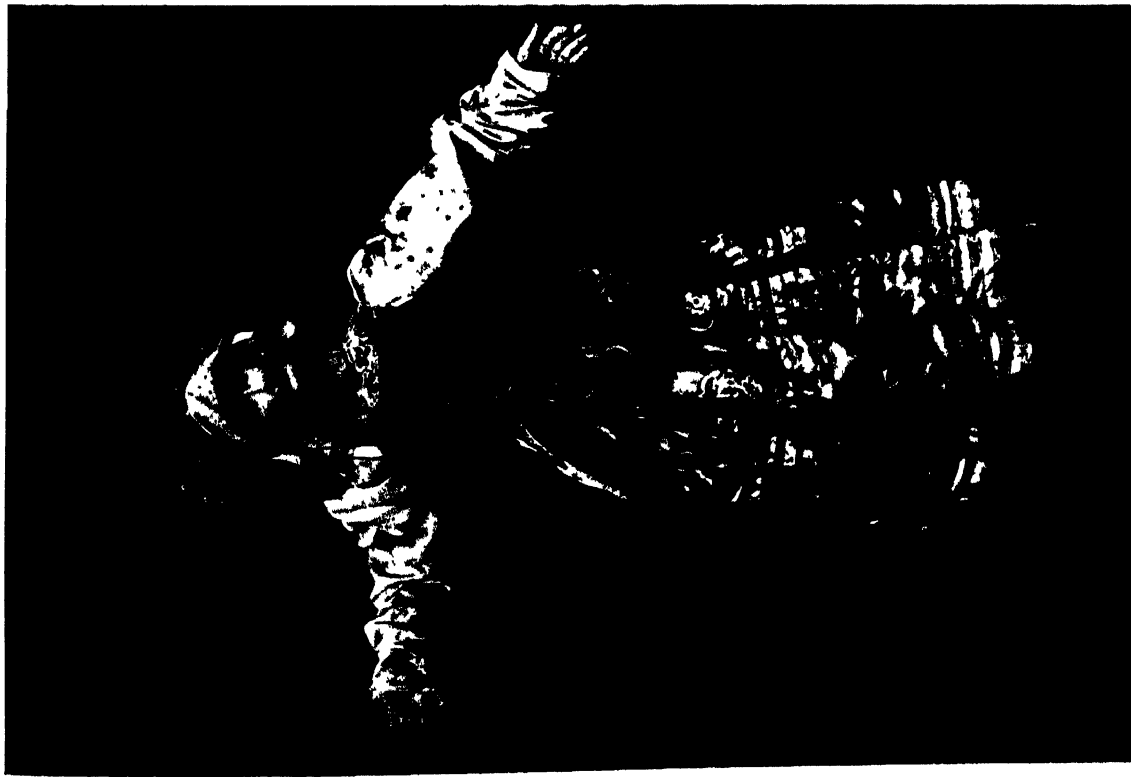


Fig 159. GONCHAROVA: MARIONETTE



Fig 160. GONCHAROVA: MARIONETTE





Fig. 161. GONCHAROVA: MARIONETTE

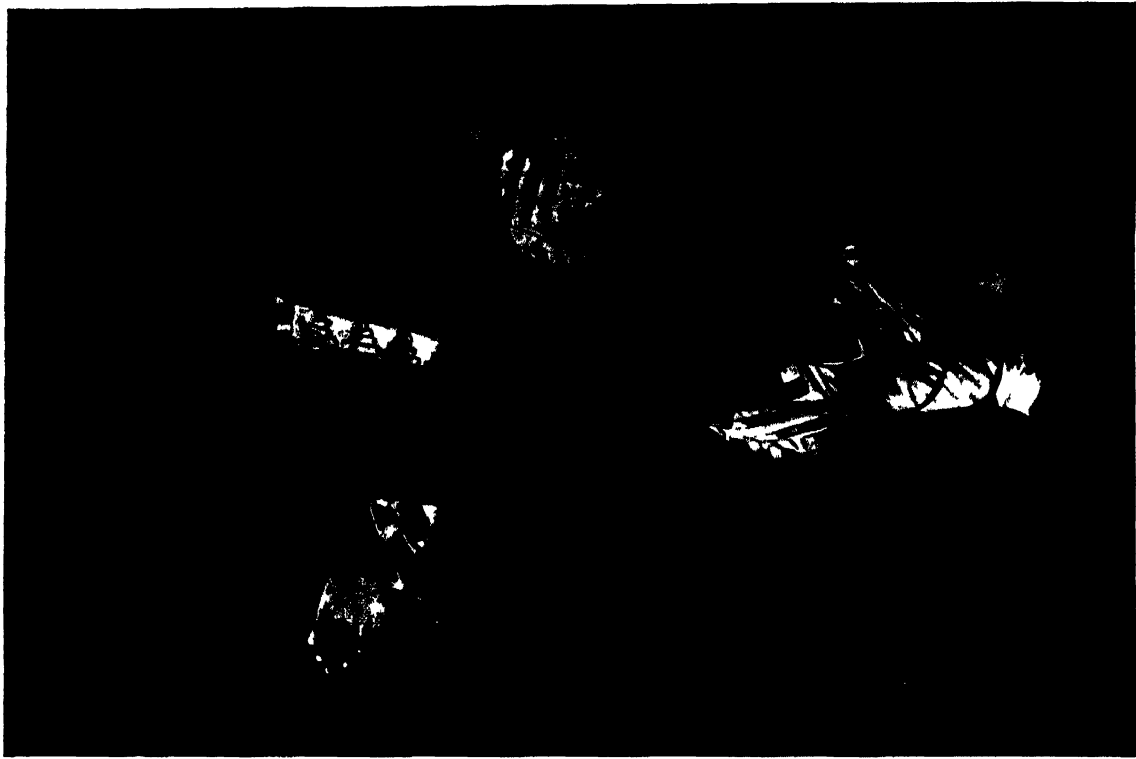


Fig. 162. GONCHAROVA: MARIONETTE



Fig 164 GONCHAROVA MARIONETTE



Fig 163 MASSIN IN "LE SOLEIL DE MINUIT"  
Costume by Larionov





Fig 165 LARIONOV SCENERY FOR "CHOUT" ("THE BUFFOON")  
National Library, Vienna





Fig 166 LARIONOV 'CHOIT' DANCER



Fig 167 LARIONOV "CHOIT" THE BUFFOON AND HIS WIFE



Fig 168. LARIONOV. "LE SOLEIL DE MINUIT" (BALLET, PARIS, 1915)



Fig. 169. LARIONOV: "LE SOLEIL DE MINUIT"



Fig 170 LARIONOV. SCENIC DETAIL FROM "CHOUT"





Fig. 171. LARIONOV: HEADRESS FROM "CHOUT"



Fig. 172. LARIONOV. "CHOUT" THE BUFFOON'S WIFE

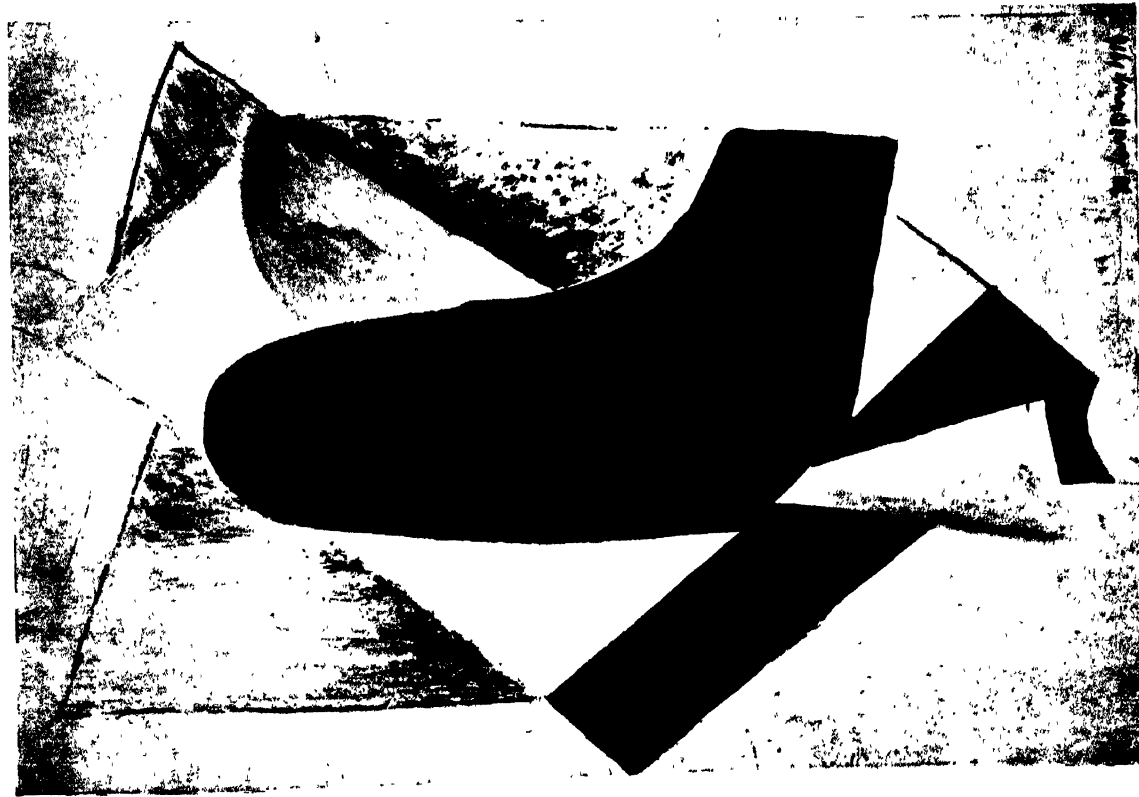


Fig. 173. LARIONOV: STAGE MASK. LIGHT AND SHADOW EFFECT  
Cf. Fig. 175

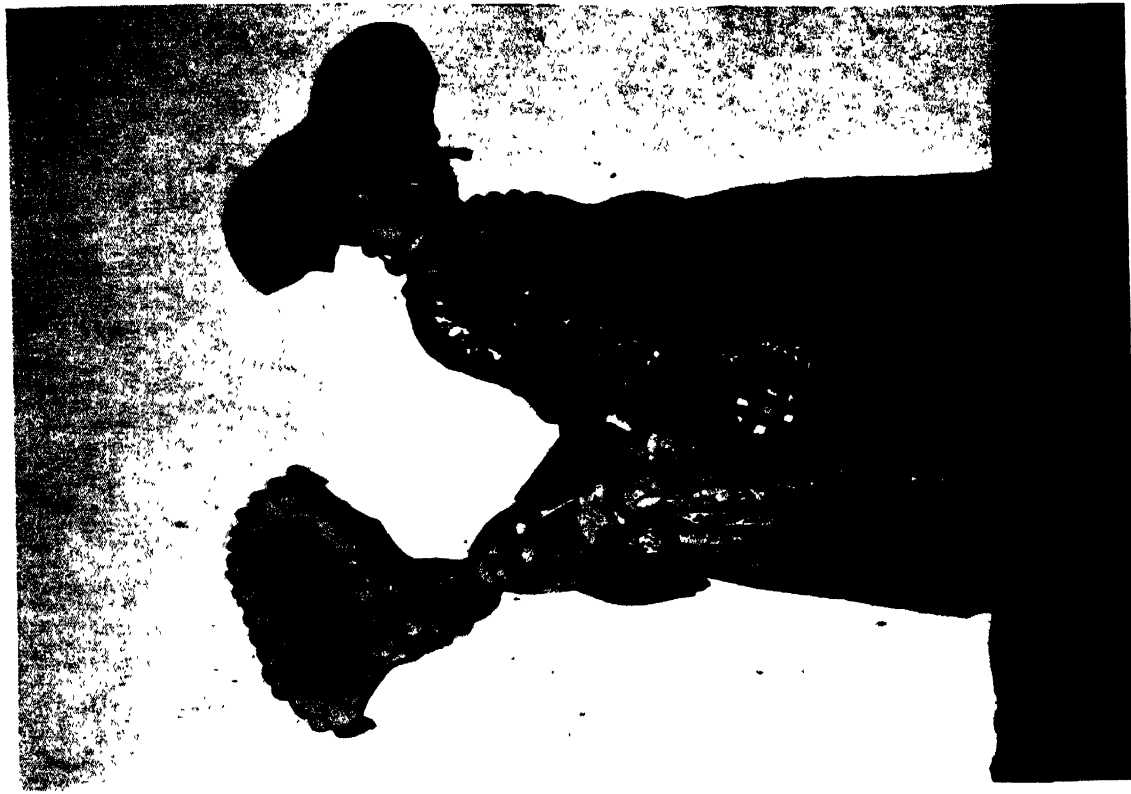
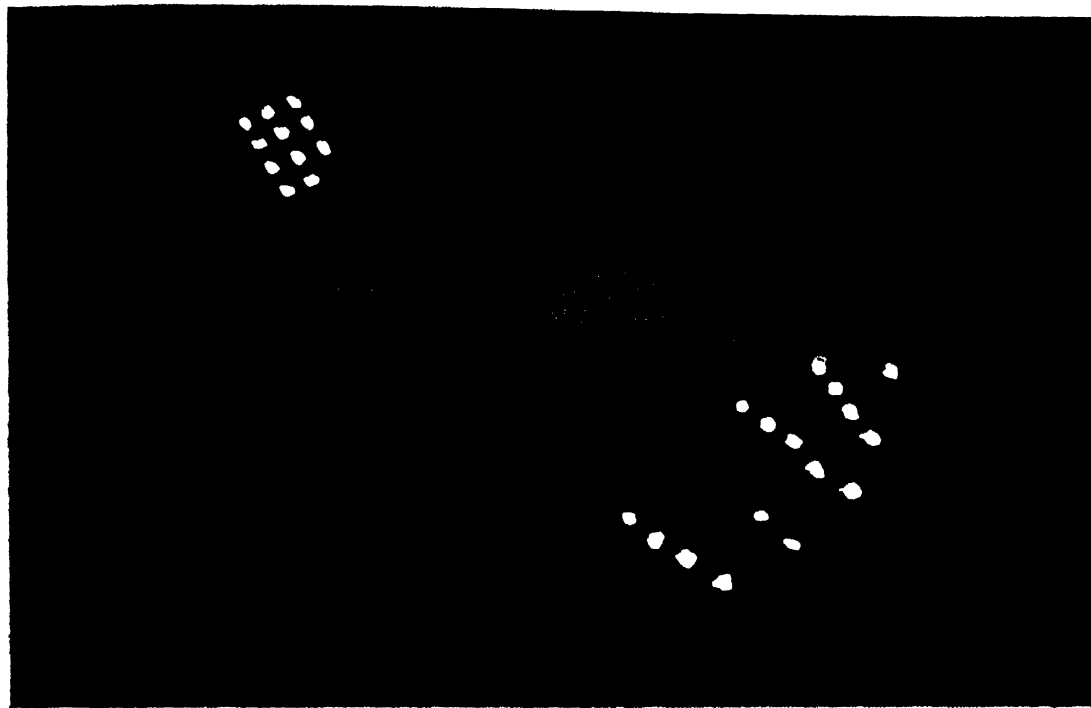


Fig. 174. LARIONOV: FIGURE STUDY FOR "LE SOLEIL DE MINUIT"





COLOUR EFFECT (cf. Fig. 173)



Figs. 175, 176. LARIONOV: THEATRICAL STUDIES

ACTION



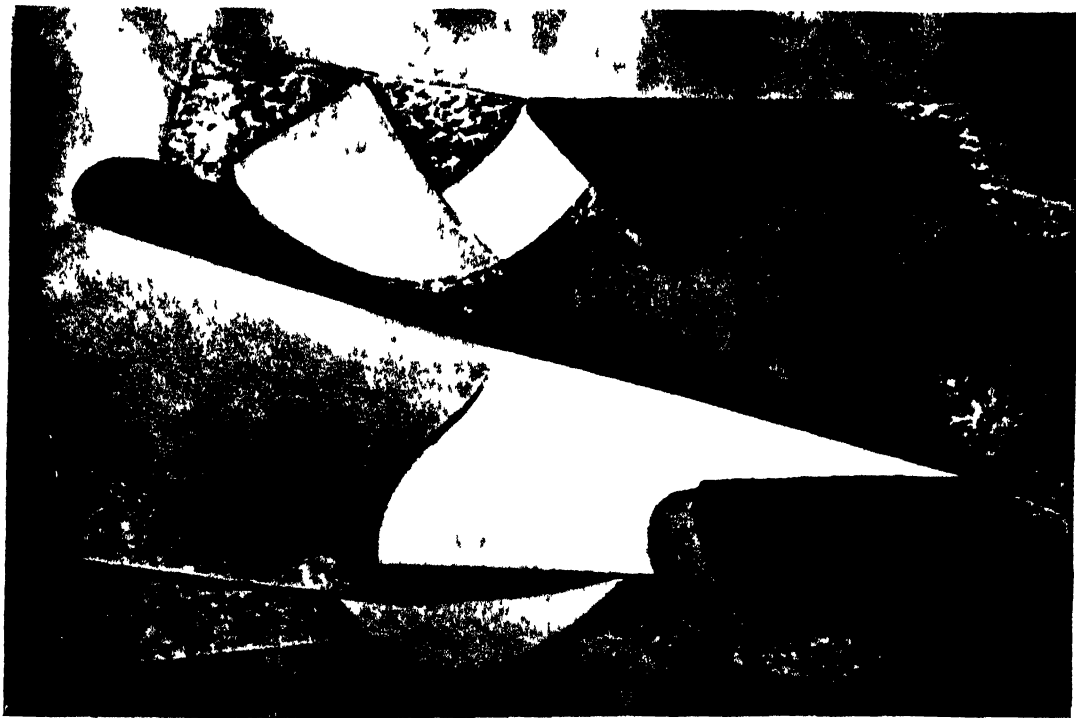


Fig 177 LARIONOV SCENERY IN RELIEF ("COLLISSE")

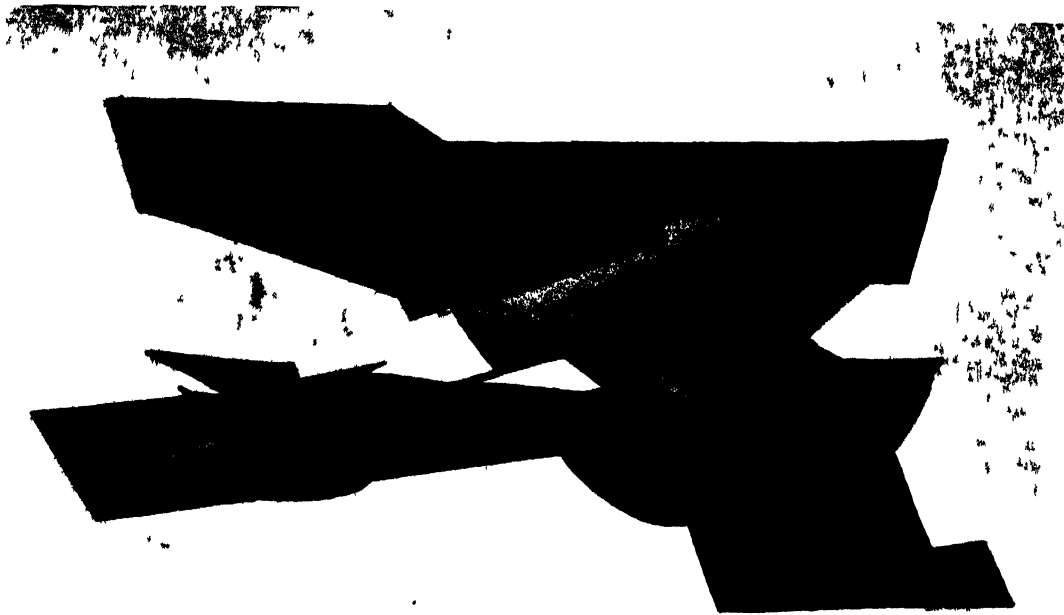


Fig 178 LARIONOV SCENIC SKETCH



Fig 179 LARIONOV CURTAIN

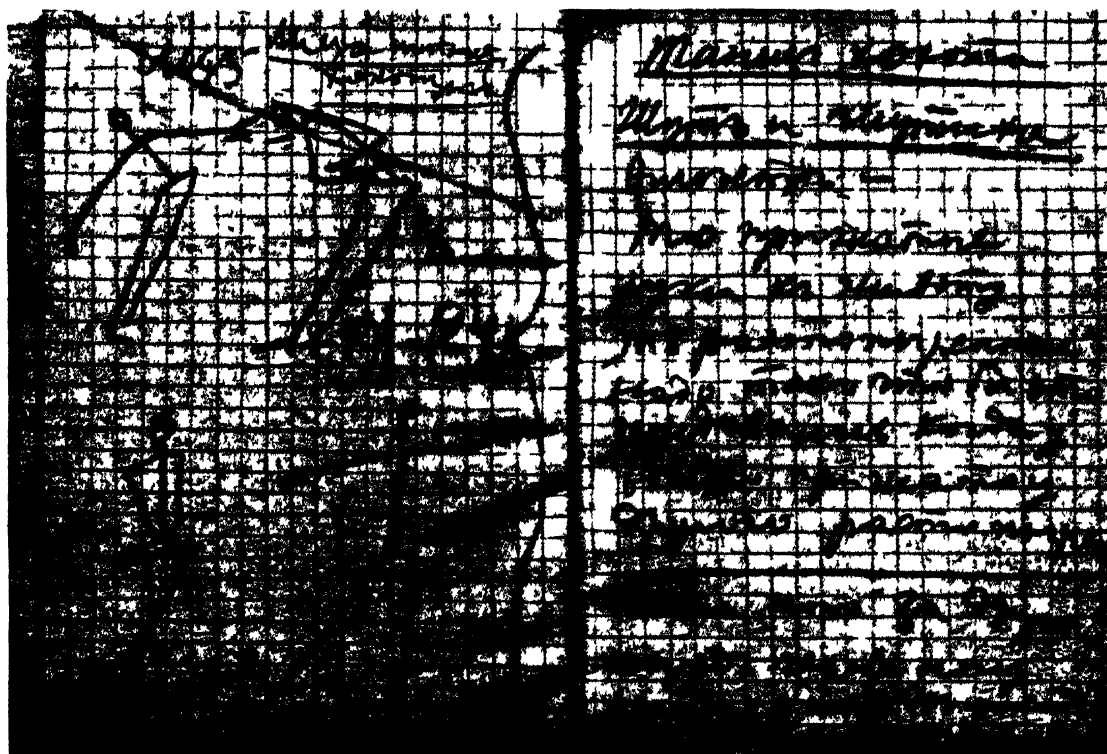


Fig 180 LARIONOV STENO-CHOREOGRAPHIC NOTATION



SS.

Fig. 181. POSHIDAY. FIGURE STUDY  
Yushny Collection







# THE LITTLE THEATRE: BAKST TRADITION



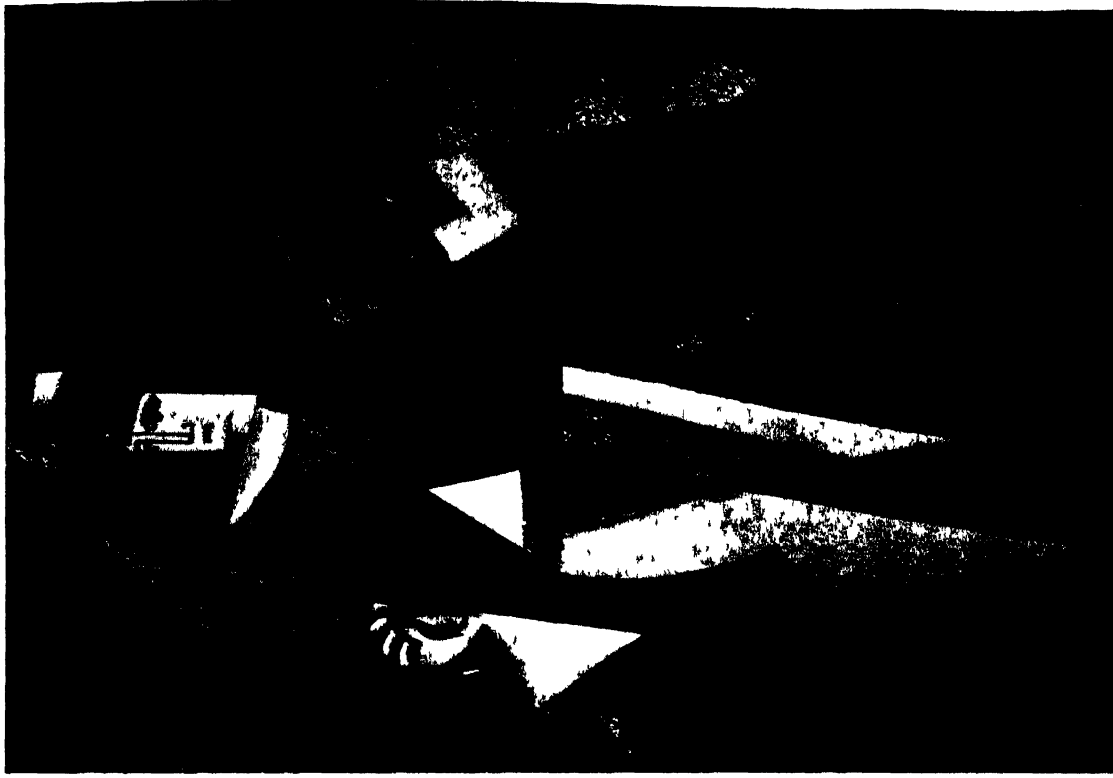


Fig 184 TCHELISHEV FIGURE STUDY  
Yusky Collection



Fig 183 URVANOV COSTUME STUDY  
National Library, Vienna



Fig. 185. B. SHUKALEV: SCENERY FOR "LA PASTORALE"



Fig. 186. URYANOV: SCENERY FOR A FAIRY TALE

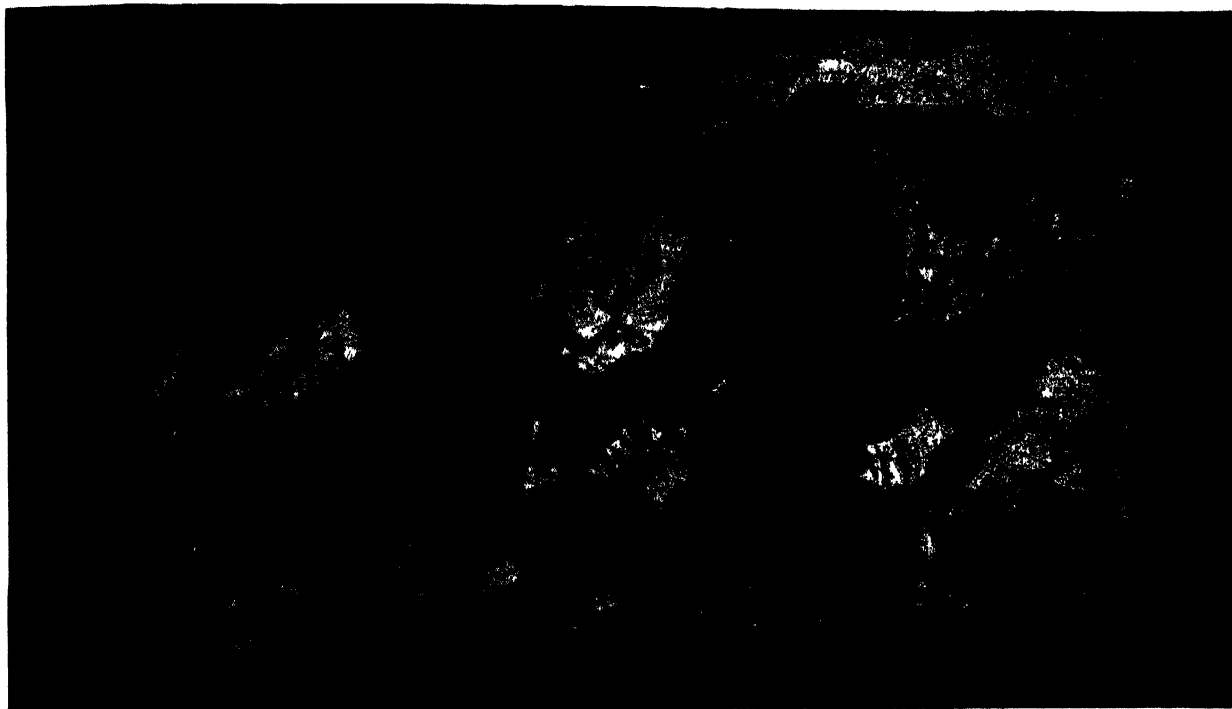


Fig. 187. ORIGINAL SKETCH FOR THE "VOLGA BOATMEN" SCENE IN "L'OISEAU BLEU". *Yushny Collection*



Fig. 188. TCHELISHEV: "LUBOK". *Yushny Collection*



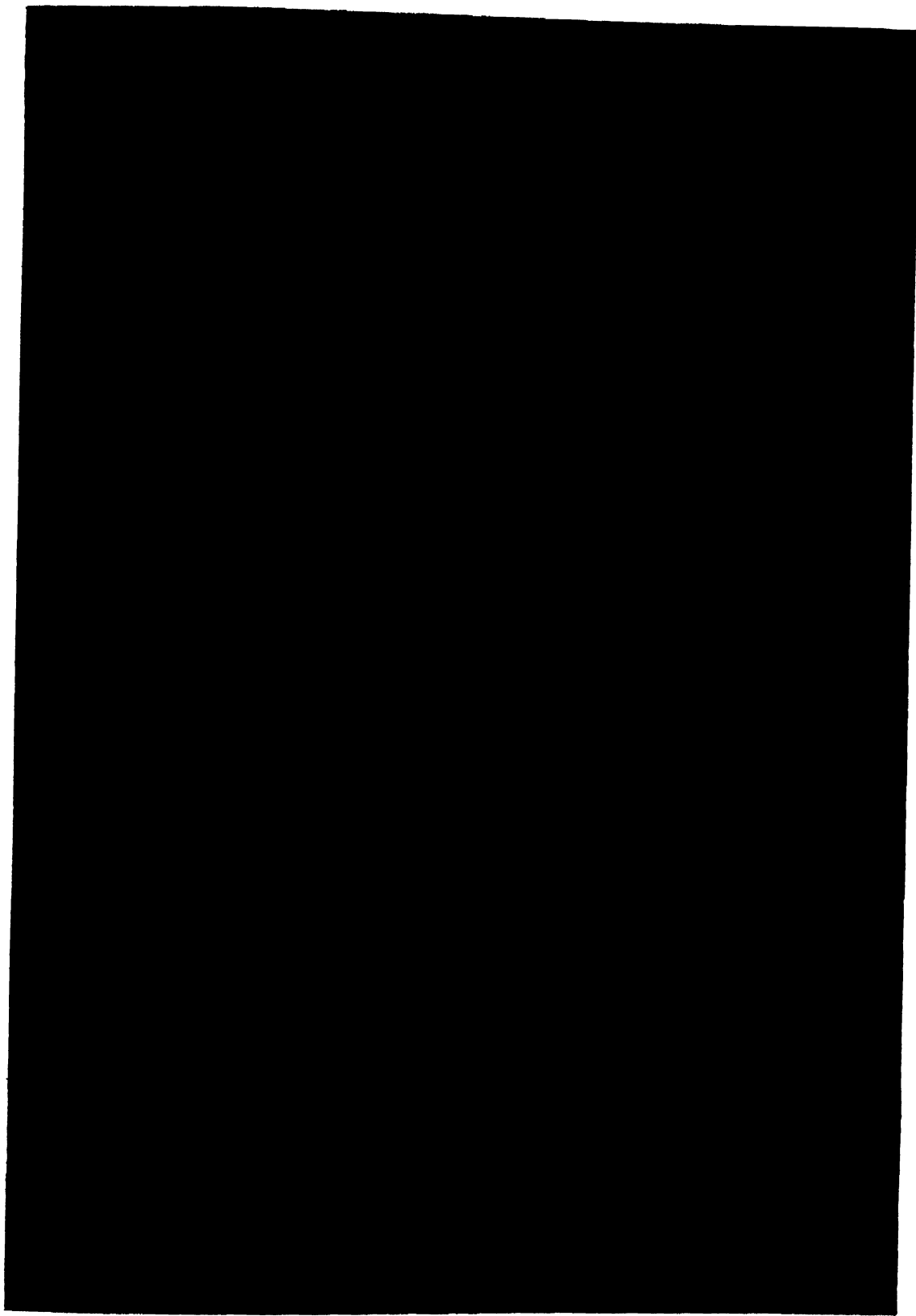


Fig. 189. URVANZOV: SCENERY. *National Library, Vienna*





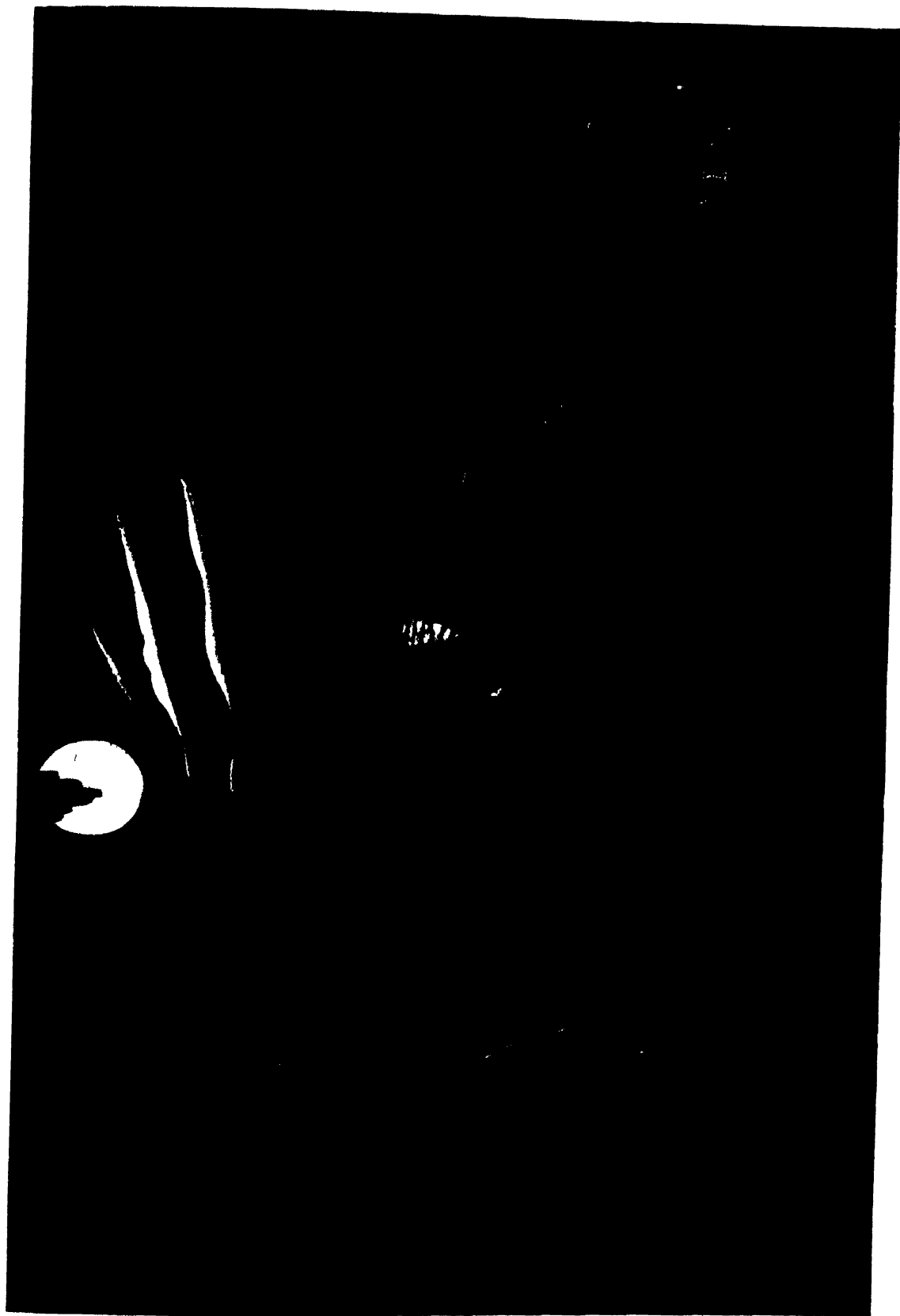


Fig. 190. SHUKAIEV: SKETCH FOR SCENERY IN "UNE FÊTE CHAMPÊTRE"





Fig. 191. POSHPDAIEV FIGURI STUDY. Yushman Collection



# THE MOSCOW KAMERNY THEATRE





Fig. 192. A. EXTER: SCENERY FOR "TAMIRA" (1916)



Fig. 193. EXTER: CONSTRUCTIVIST SETTING FOR "PANTOMIME ESPAGNOLE"





Fig 194 EXTER "SALOMÉ" (1917)

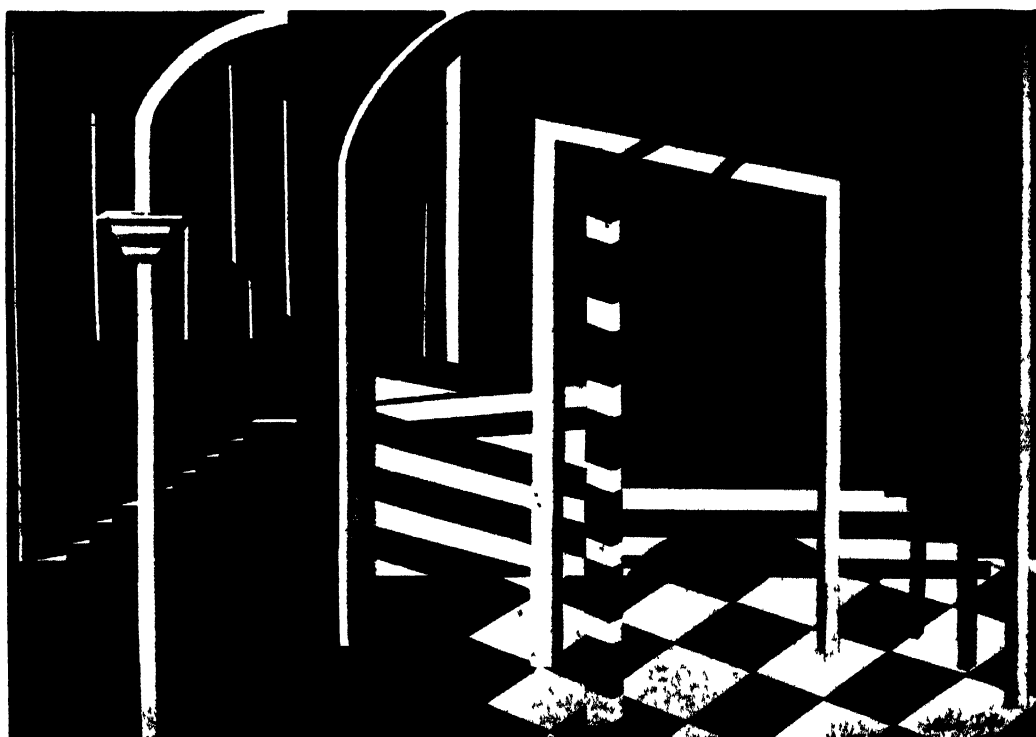


Fig 195. EXTER CONSTRUCTIVIST SETTING FOR "OTHELLO" (1927)



Fig. 196. EXTER: CONSTRUCTIVIST SETTING FOR CALDERON'S "LA DAMA DUENDA"



Fig. 197. EXTER: CONSTRUCTIVIST SETTING FOR THE FILM "THE DAUGHTER OF THE SUN"

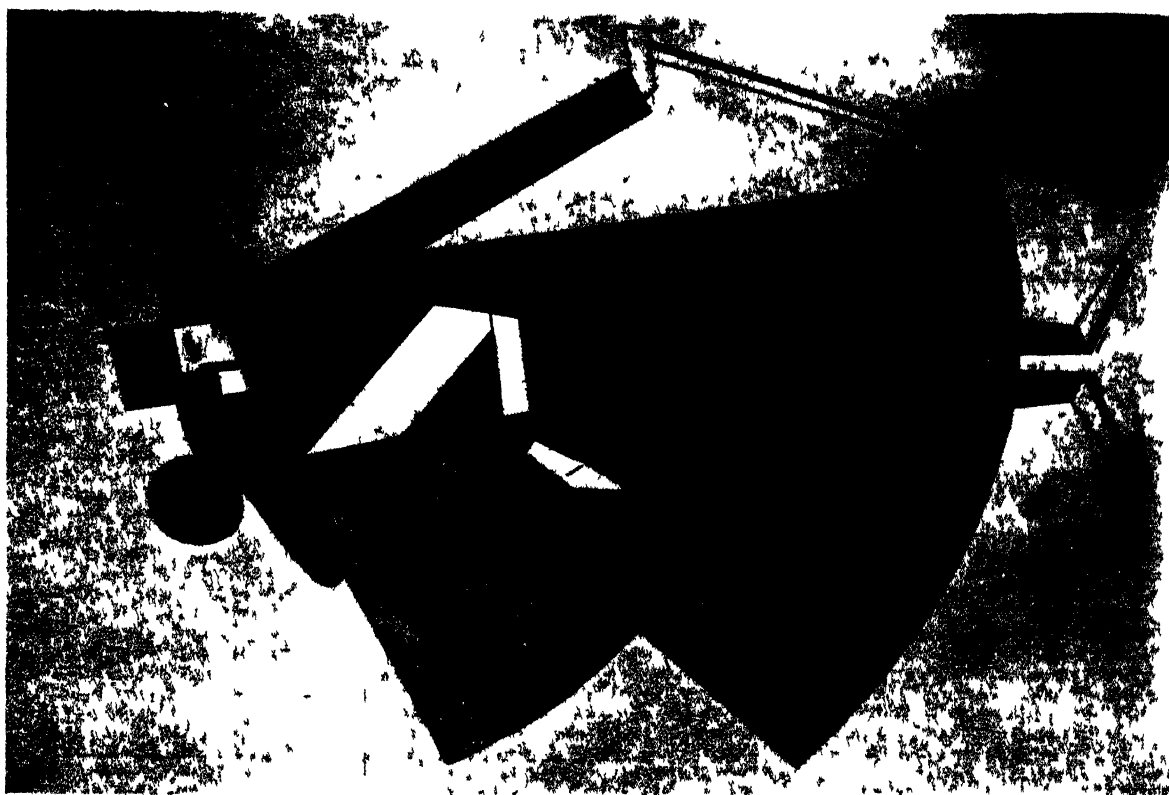
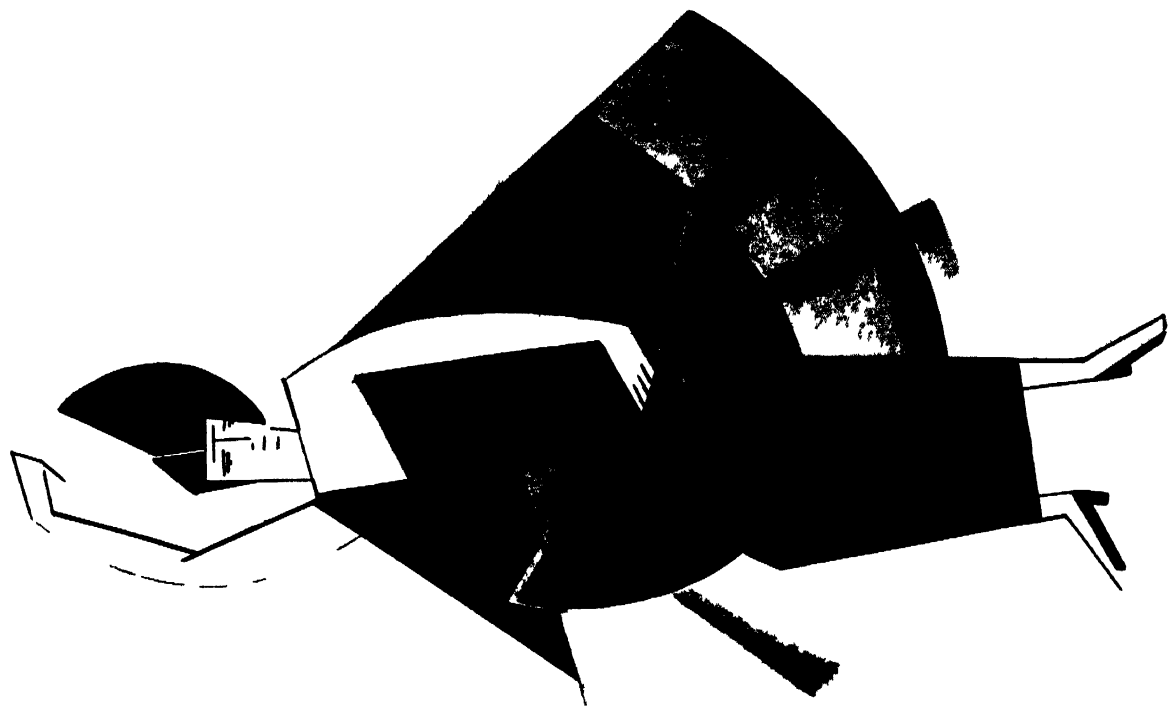


Fig 198 ENTER COSTUME SKETCH FOR A PLAY BY CALDERON



Fig. 201. FEODOROV: FIGURE STUDY OF A DANCER

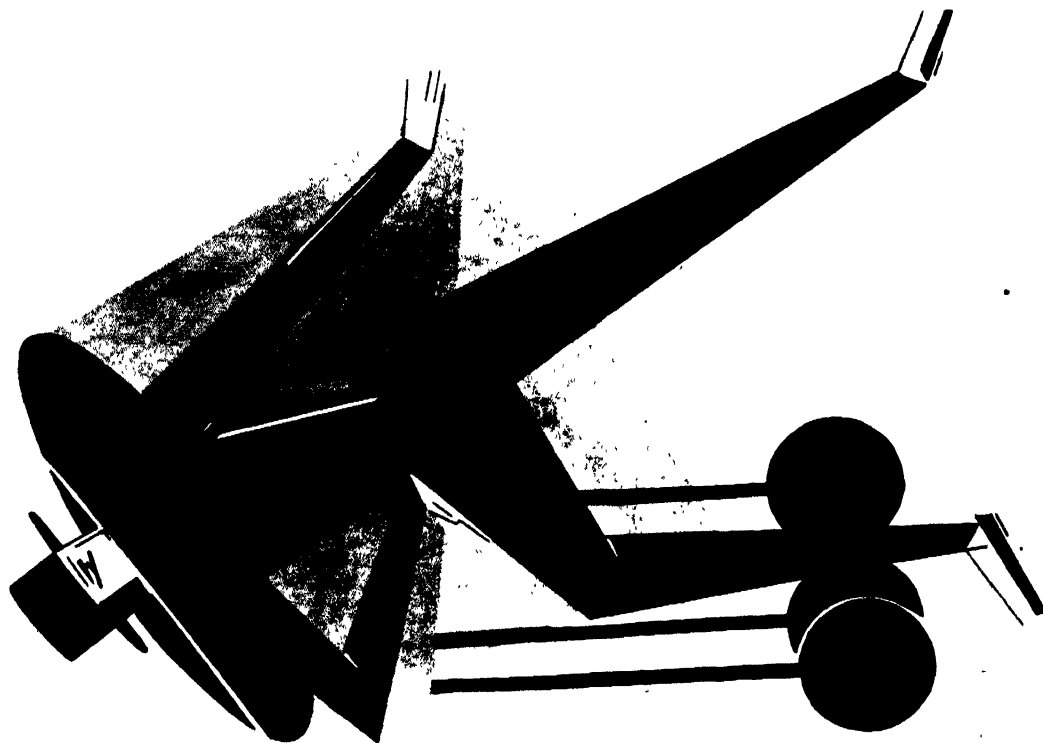


Fig. 200. EXTER: COSTUME SKETCH

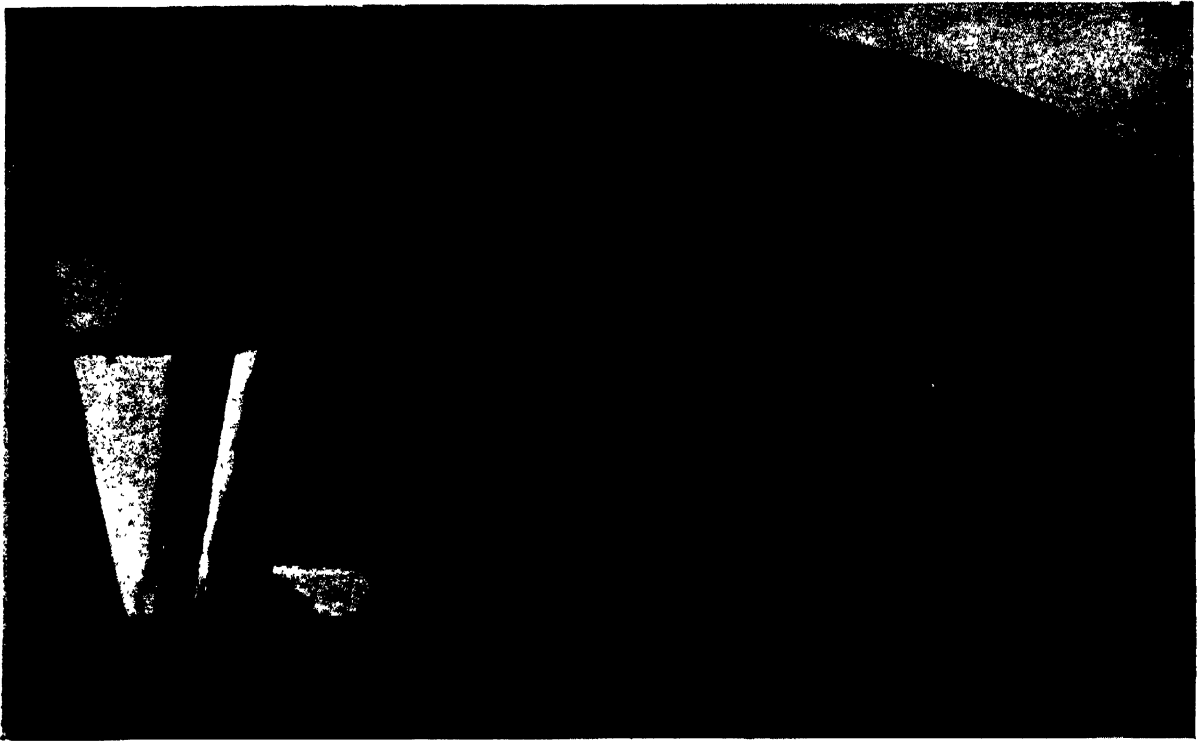


Fig. 202. A. VESNIN: CARDBOARD MODEL FOR "I



Fig. 203. VESNIN: COSTUME FOR "PHÈDRE

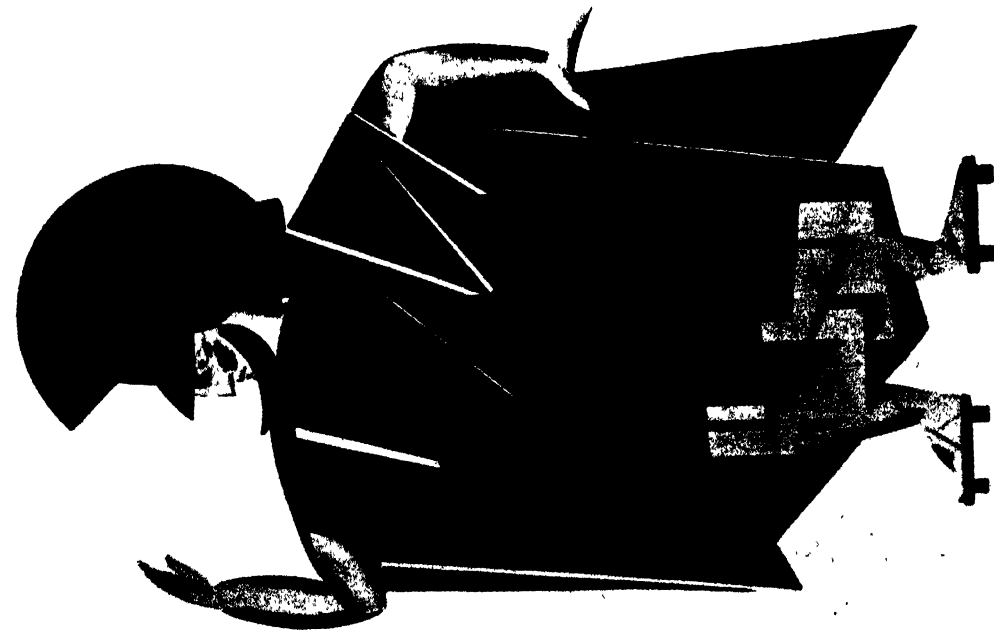


Fig. 204. VESNIN: COSTUME SKETCH

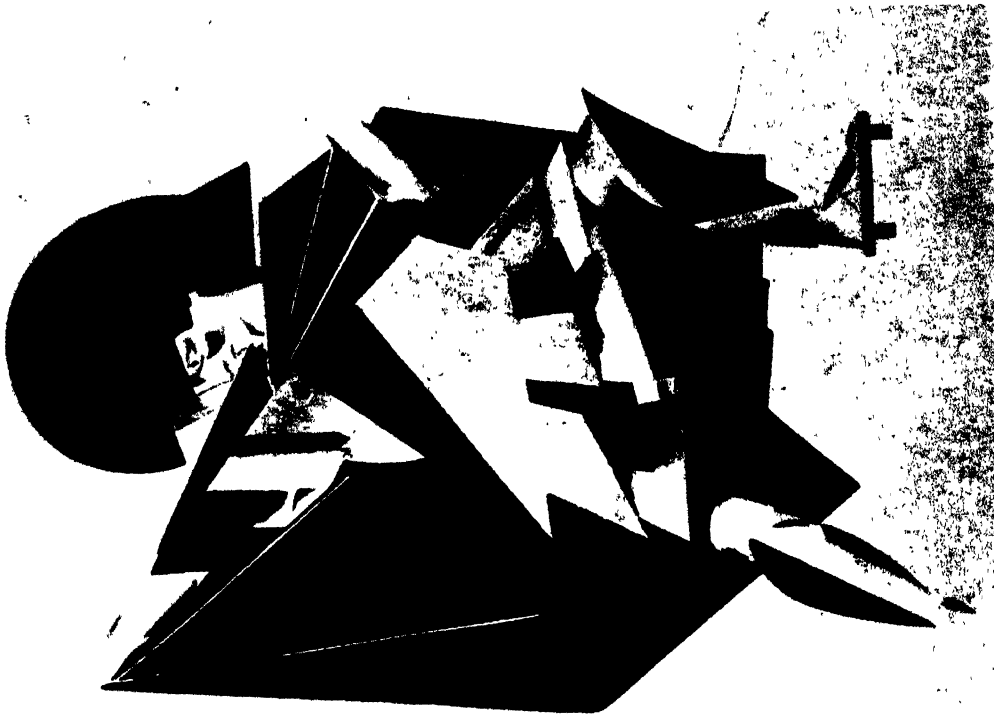


Fig. 205. VESNIN: COSTUME SKETCH



Fig. 206. SCENE FROM "THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY"

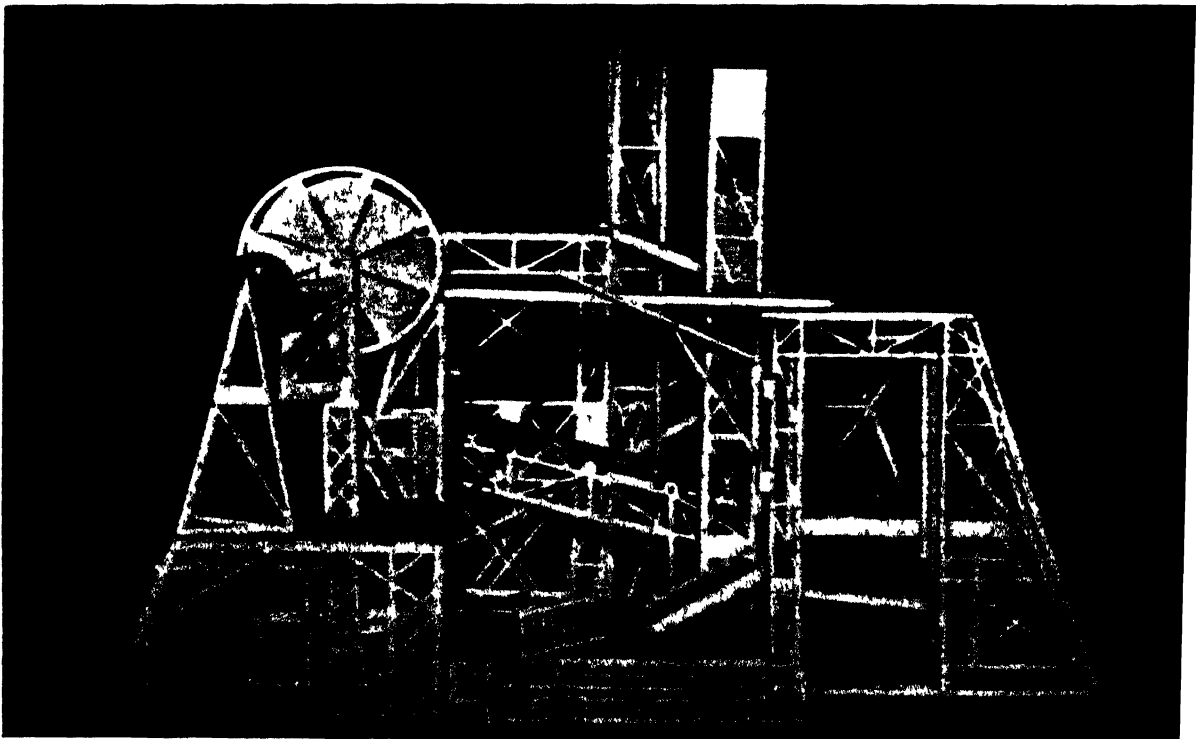


Fig. 207. VESNIN: CONSTRUCTIVIST SETTING FOR "THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY"



Fig. 208. DETAIL FROM "THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY"

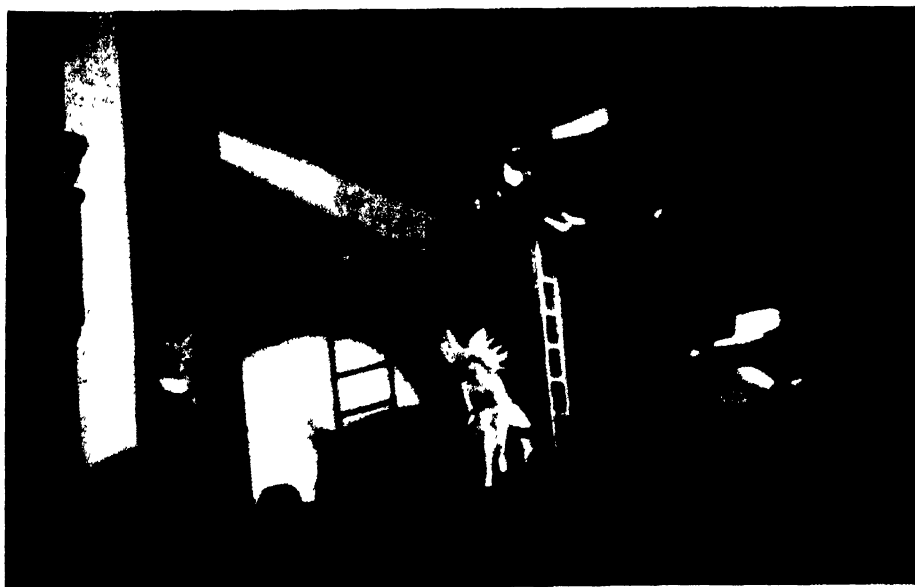


Fig. 209. "LE JOUR ET LA NUIT": OPERETTA BY LECOCQ  
*Photo by Dr Gregor, taken during the performance*





Fig 210 B I ERDINANDOV ADRIENNE LLCOUVRLUR

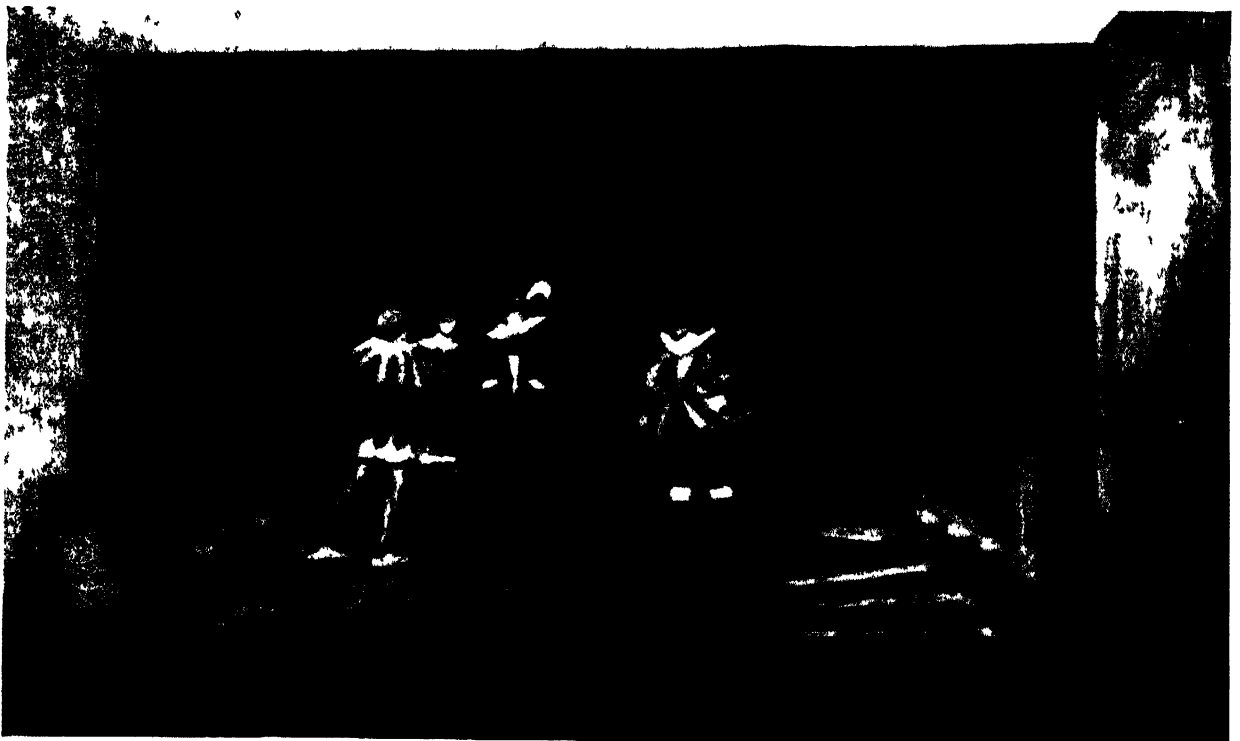


Fig 211 O AMOSOVA "LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST



Fig. 212. G. AND W. STENBERG. "SAINT JOAN," SCENE II

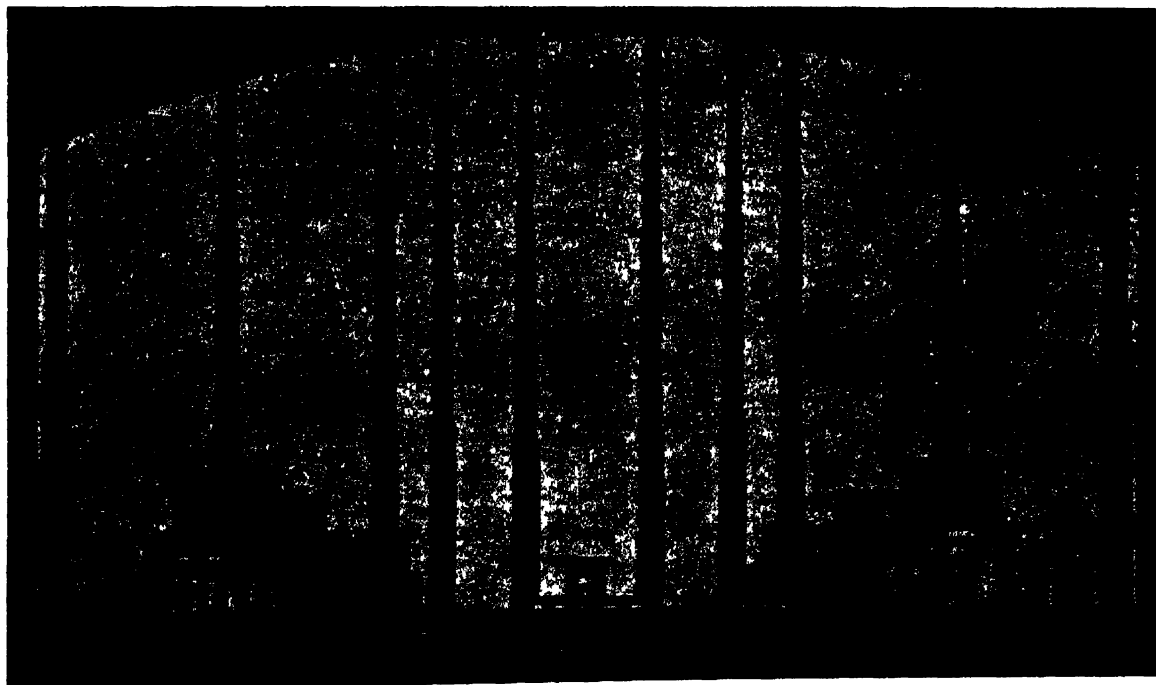


Fig. 213. G. AND W. STENBERG: "SAINT JOAN," SCENE VI





Fig. 214. G. YAKULOV: "GIROFLÉ GIROFLÀ": FINALE



Fig. 215. YAKULOV: "GIROFLÉ GIROFLÀ": ACTION

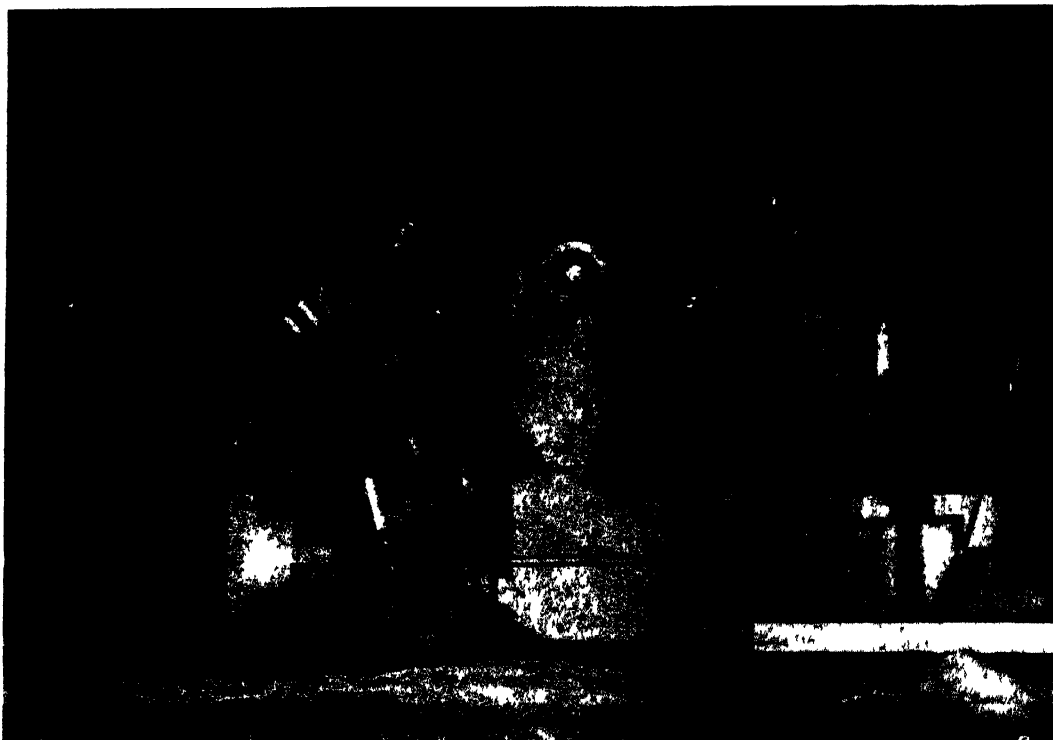


Fig 216 YAKULOV "GIROPLÉ GIROFLÀ"



Fig. 217. YAKULOV: "PRINCESS BRAMBILLA'

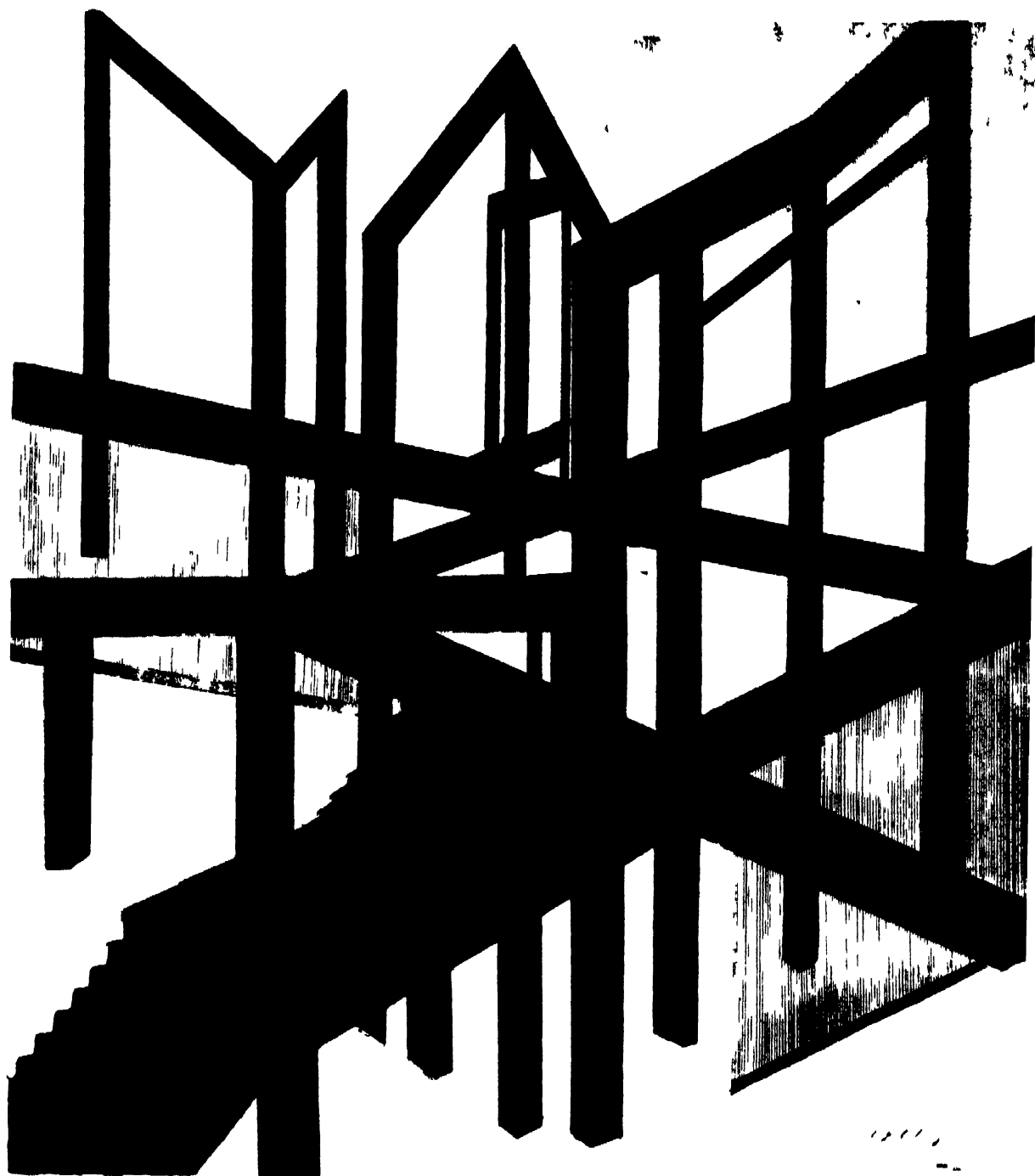


Fig 218 EXTER CONSTRUCTIVIST SETTING FOR A TRAGLDY



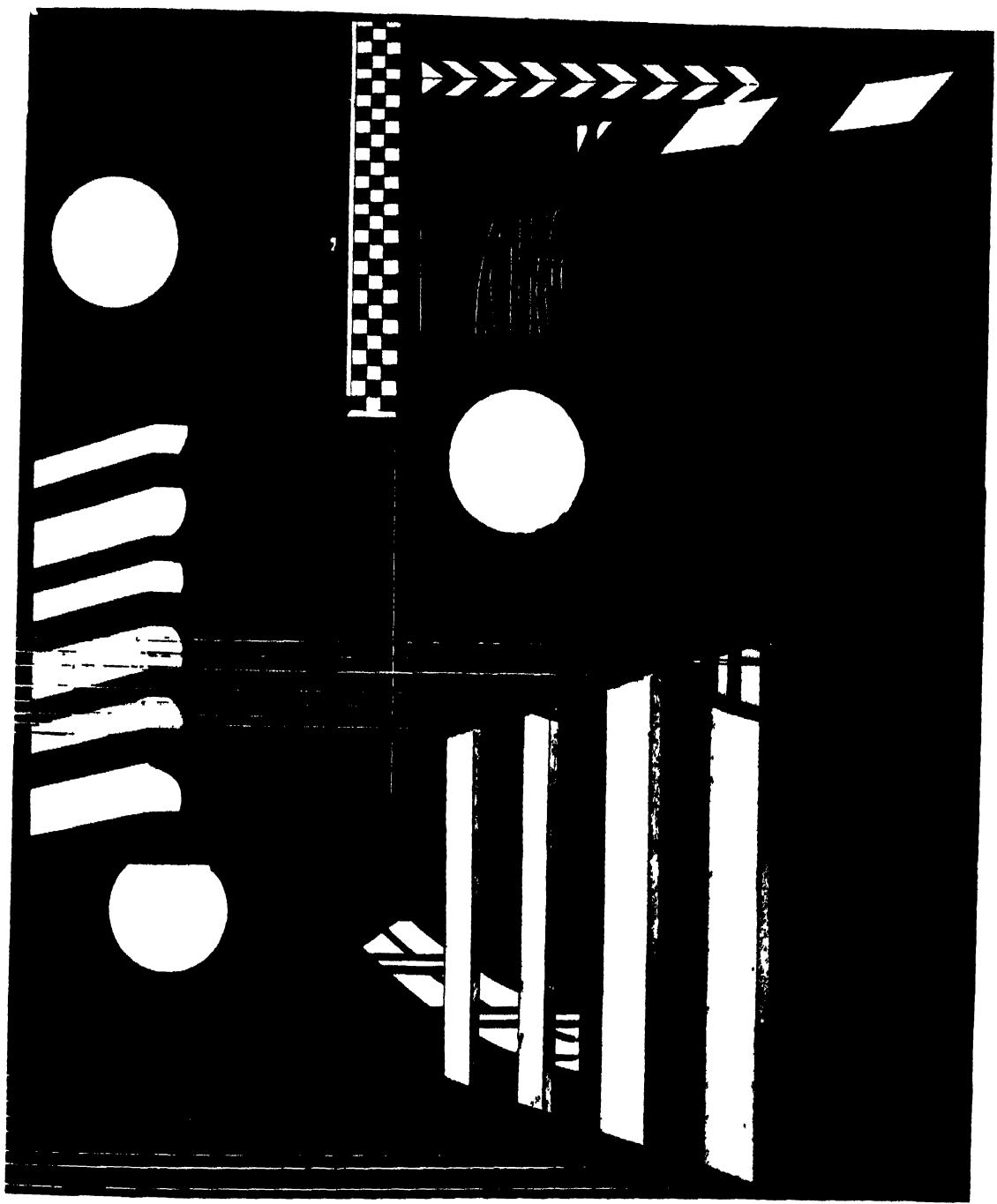


Fig. 219. EXTER: "THE MERCHANT OF VENICE". *National Library, Vienna*







Fig. 220. YAKULOV: COSTUME SKETCH FOR "THE SEDUCER OF SEVILLE."



Fig. 221. YAKULOV: COSTUME SKETCH FOR "THE SEDUCER OF SEVILLE."



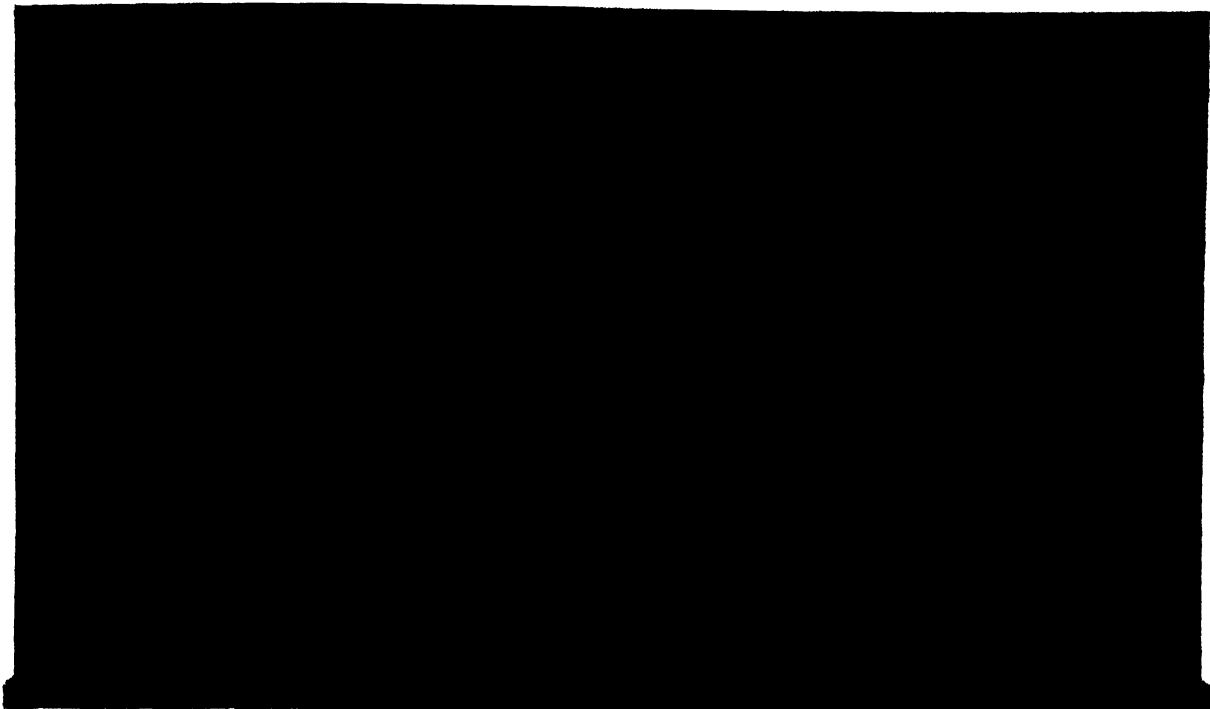


Fig. 222. "SALOMÉ": MODEL. *National Library, Vite*

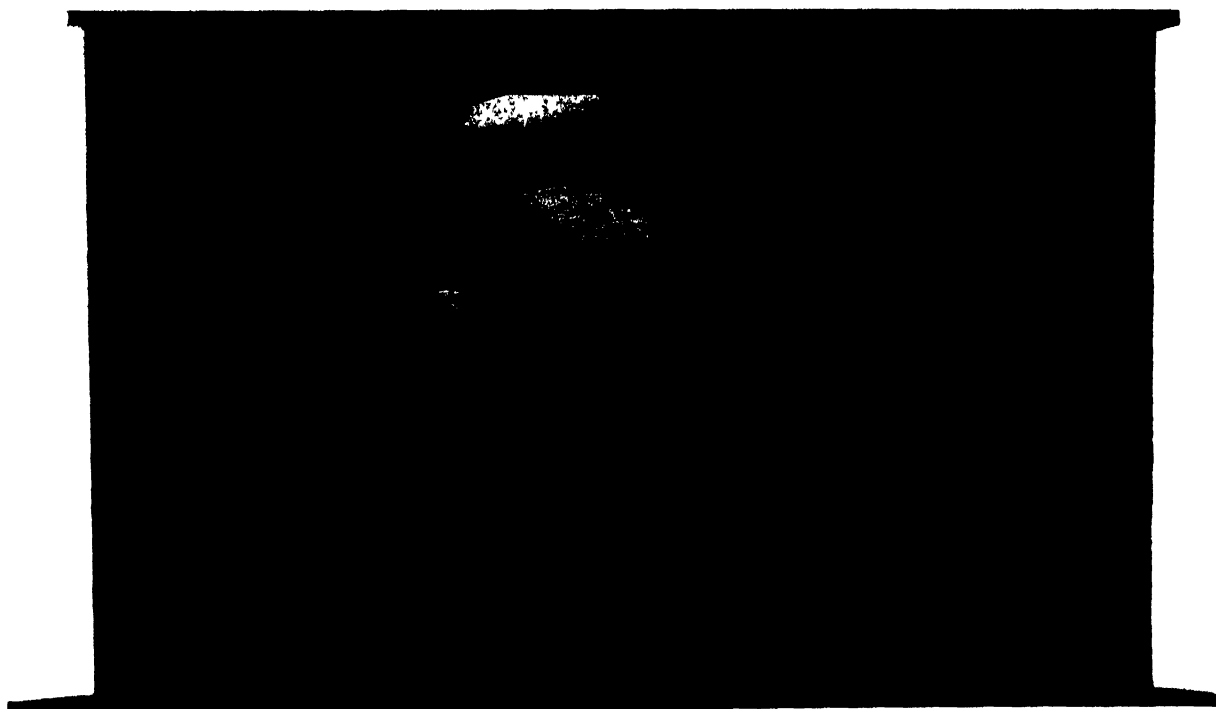


Fig. 223. FOMINA: "GALILEI": MODEL. *National Library, Vienna*



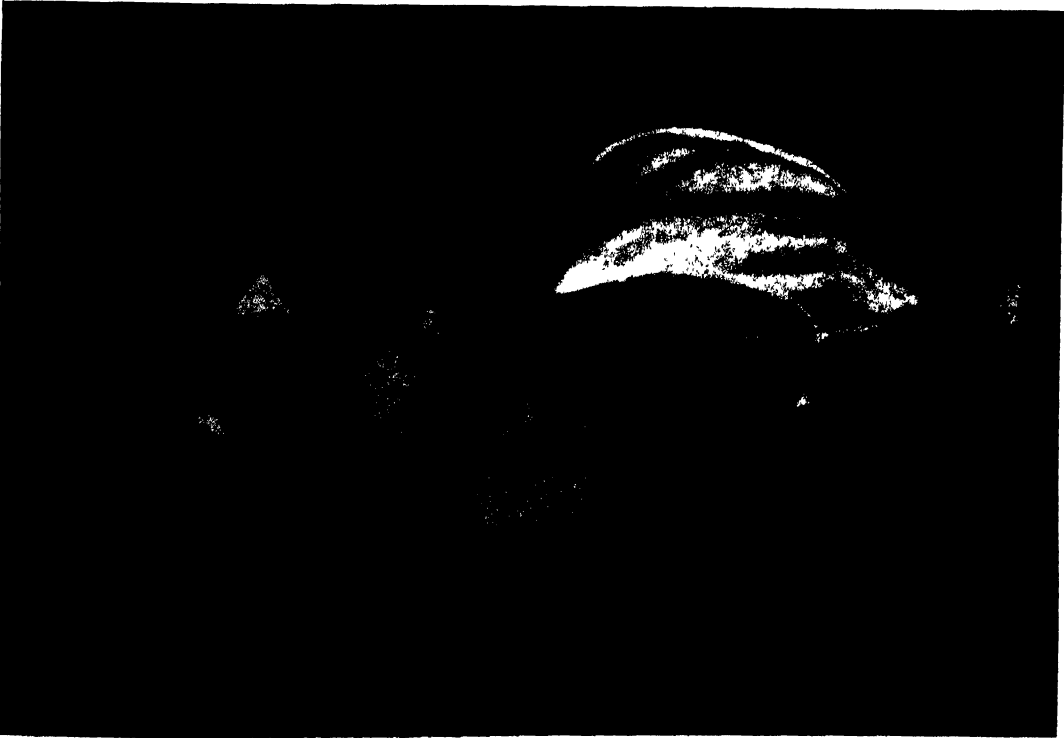


Fig. 224. ZENAIDA MAYERHOLD



Fig. 225. ALICE KOONEN



**THE LENINGRAD “STUDIOS”  
VIENNESE OPERETTA**





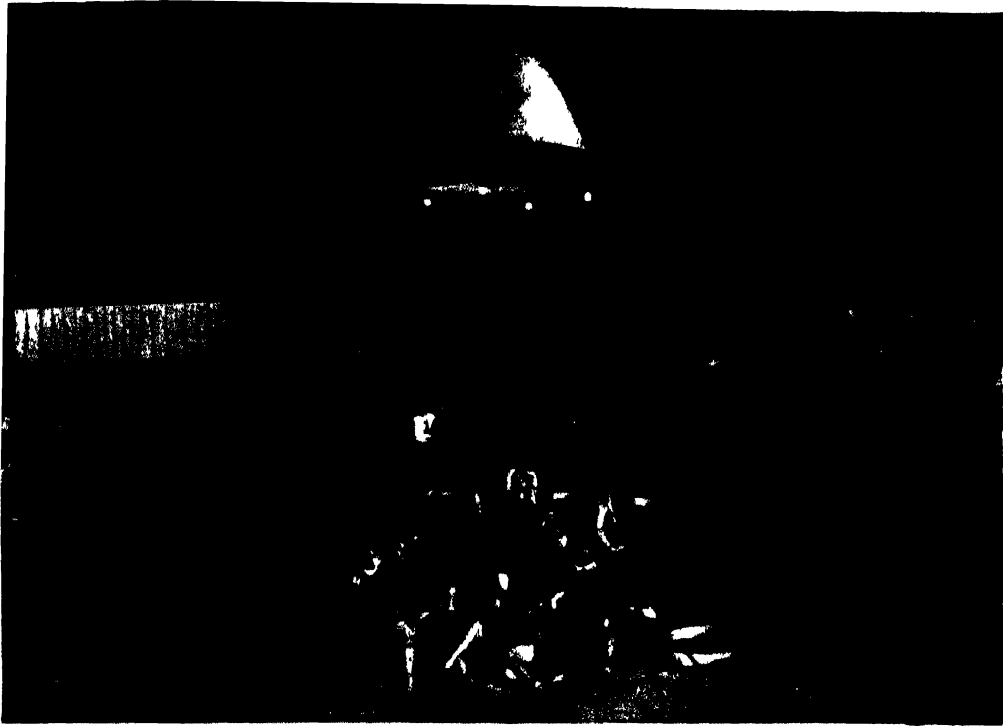


Fig. 226. SCENE FROM "THE UNDIVINE COMEDY". Experimental Theatre, Leningrad



Fig. 227. SCENE FROM "THE UNDIVINE COMEDY". Experimental Theatre, Leningrad



Fig 228. SCENE FROM "THE UNDIVIN COMEDY". Experimental Theatre Leningrad

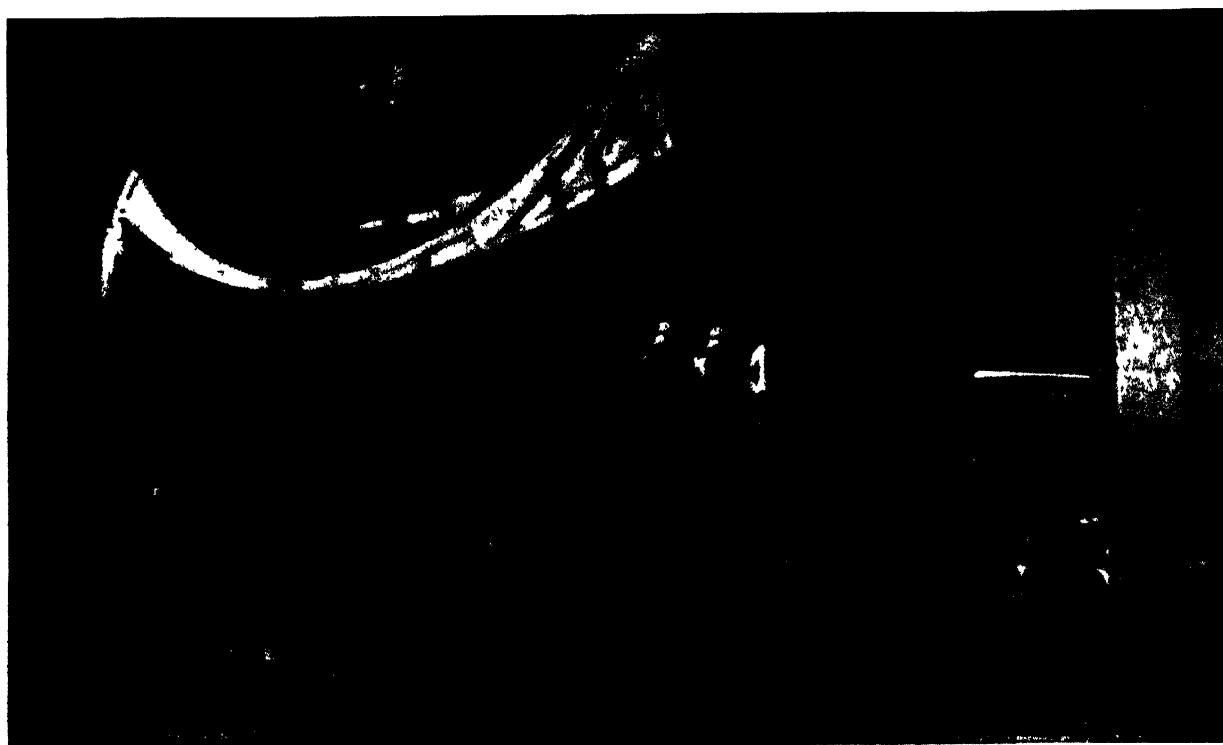


Fig. 229. SCENE FROM A LENINGRAD THEATRE

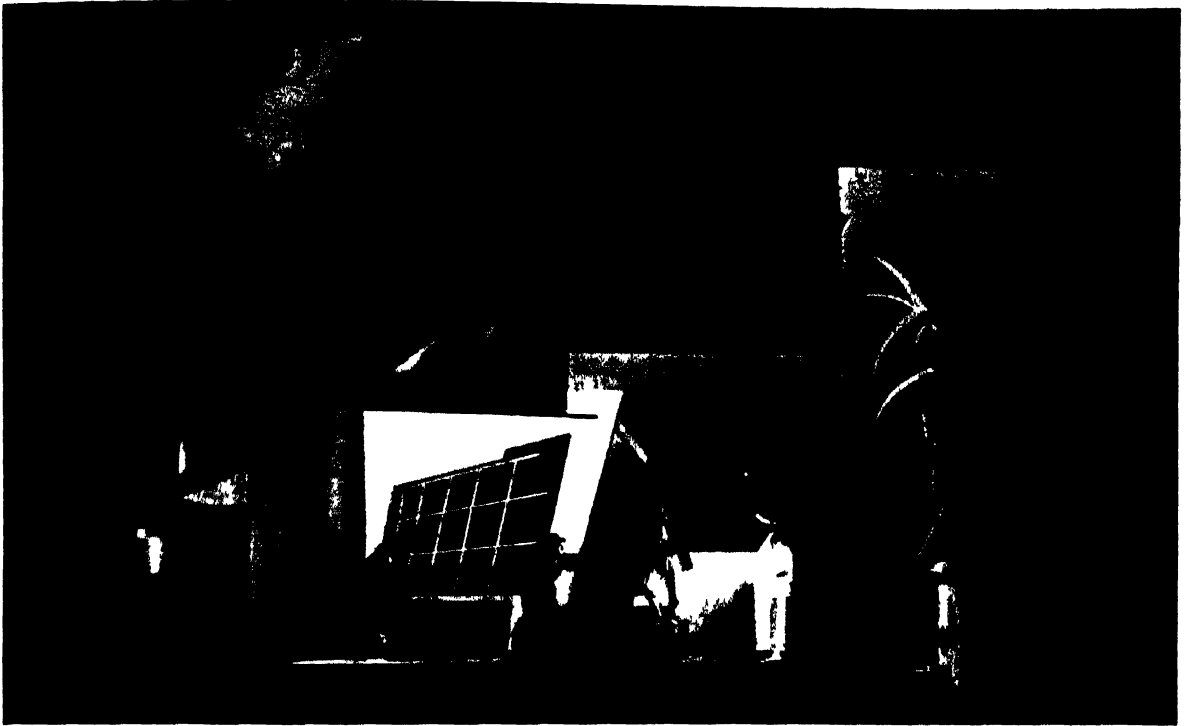


Fig. 230. SCENE FROM "MAROKKO"

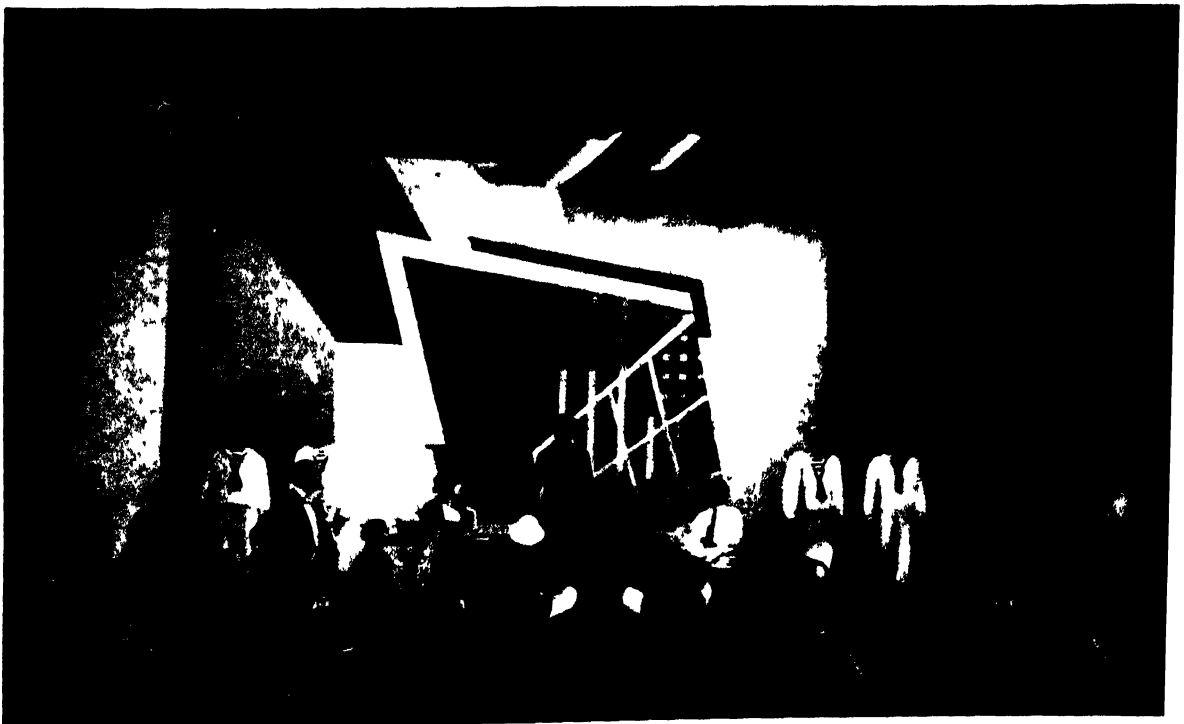


Fig. 231. SCENE FROM "MAROKKO"



Fig. 232. SCENE FROM "MAROKKO"



Fig. 233. SCENE FROM "UNLUCKY EUGENE"



Fig. 234. "UNLUCKY EUGENE"; SHADOW EFFECT



Fig. 235. SCENE FROM A LENINGRAD THEATRE



Fig. 236. A. N. FEON: "EVA" (LÉHAR), ACT I. Michailov Theatre



Fig. 237. BALLROOM SCENE FROM "EVA," ACT II. Michailov Theatre



Fig. 238. "EVA," ACT III





**DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARCHITECTURAL STYLES  
(BAROQUE INFLUENCE)**





Fig. 230. B. MATRUNIN: "THE GREEN COCKATOO"

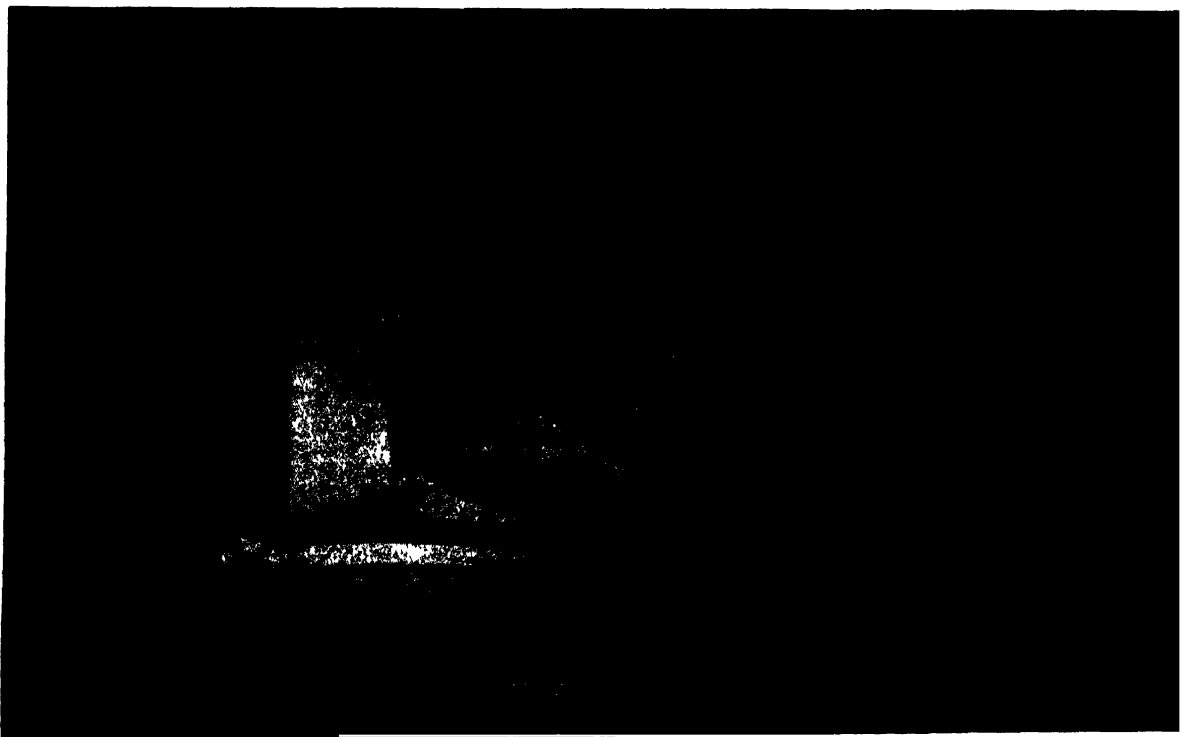
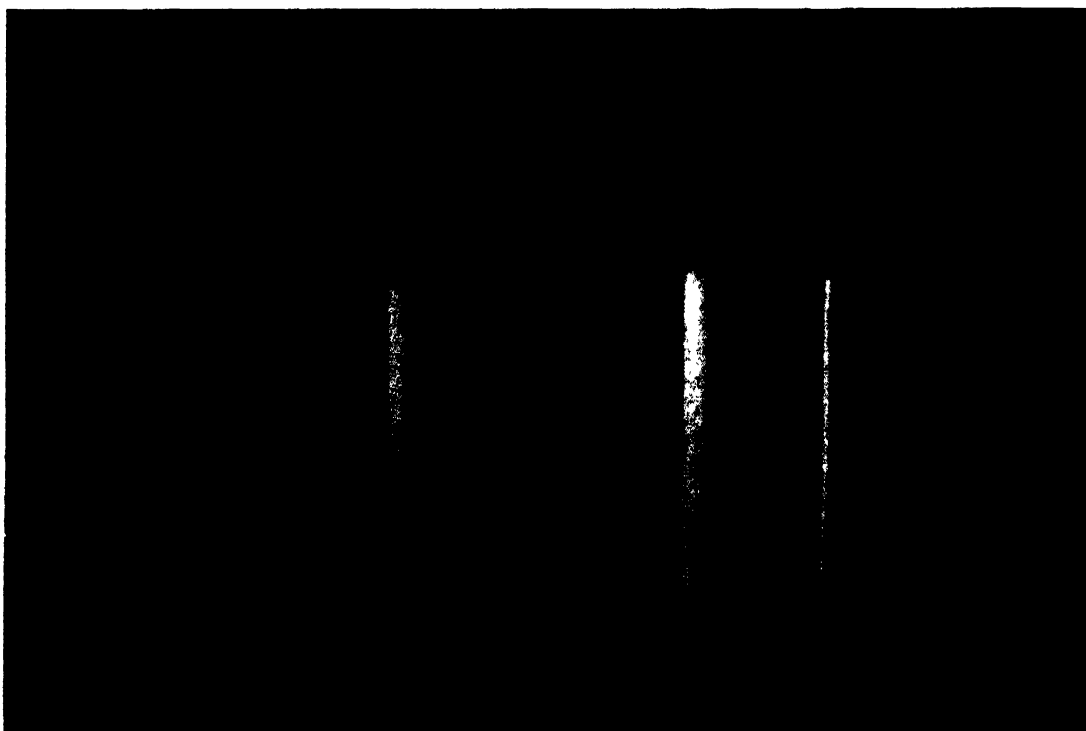


Fig. 240. MATRUNIN: STAGE-STRUCTURE FOR "THE TAMING OF THE SHREW"



Fig. 241. MATRUNIN: COSTUME SKETCHES FOR "EUGENE ONEGIN"



2. MATRUNIN: SCENE FROM "EUGENE ONEGIN"

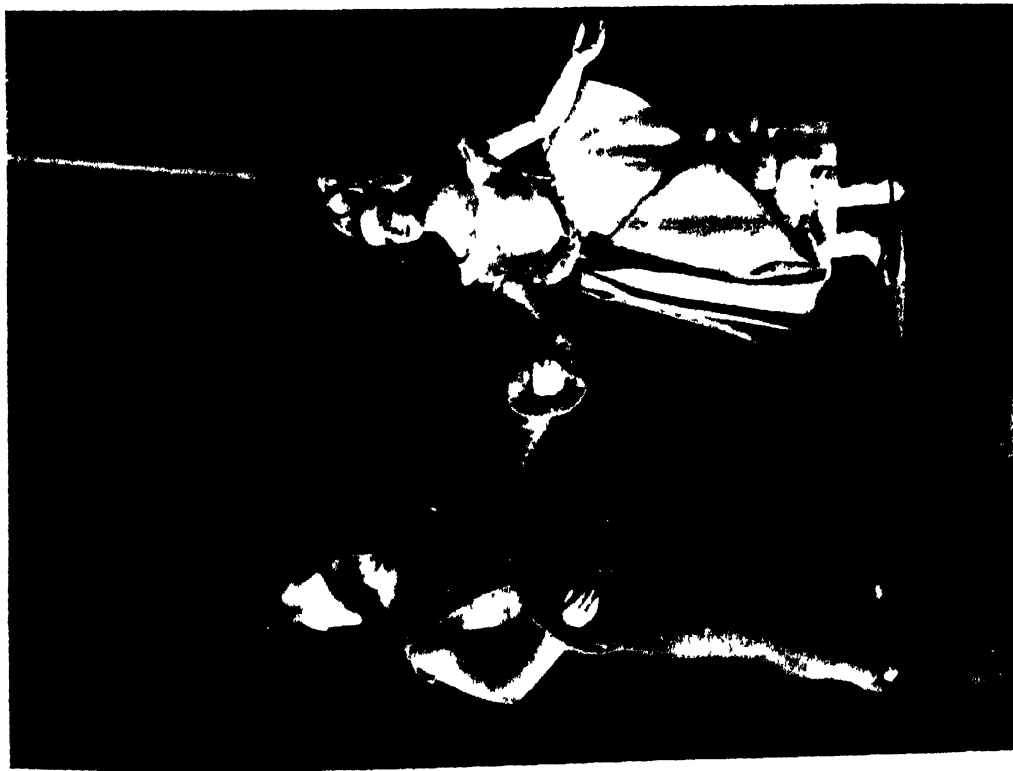
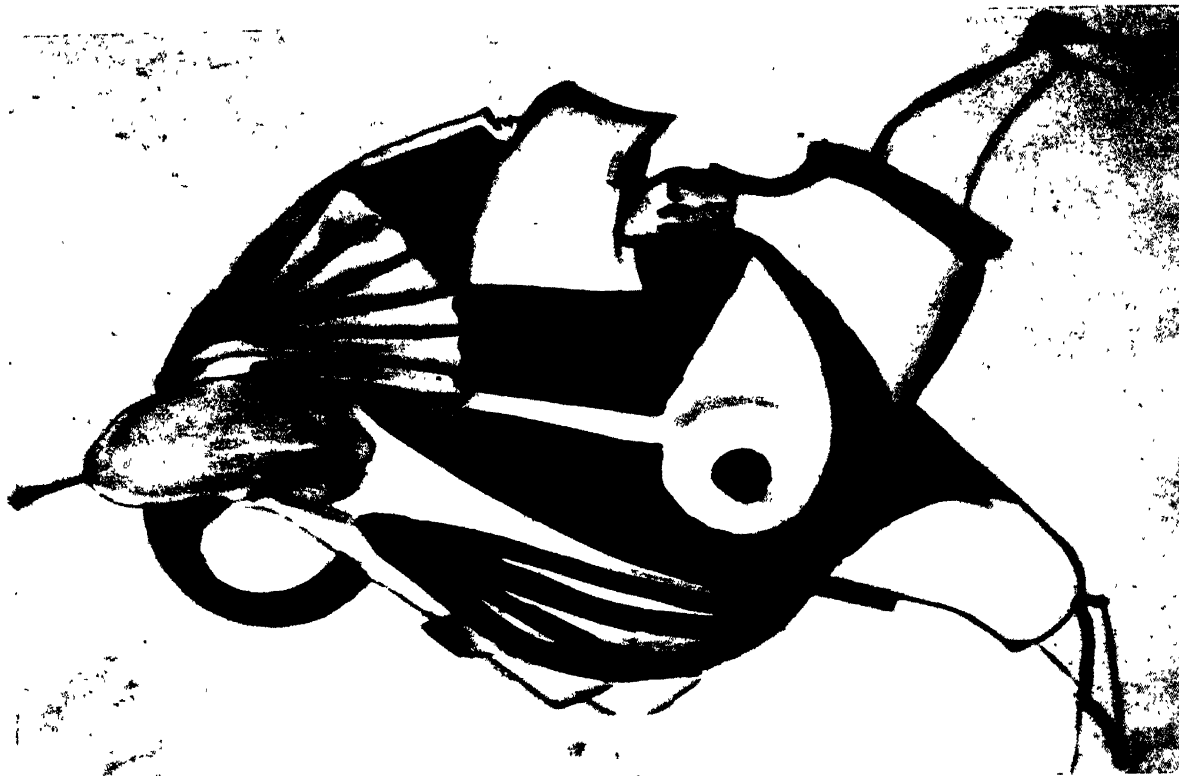


FIG 243 MATRUININ COSTUME MODELS FOR THE Taming OF THE SHREW



FIG 244 MATRUININ COSTUME SKETCH FOR "THE INVISIBLE ONE"



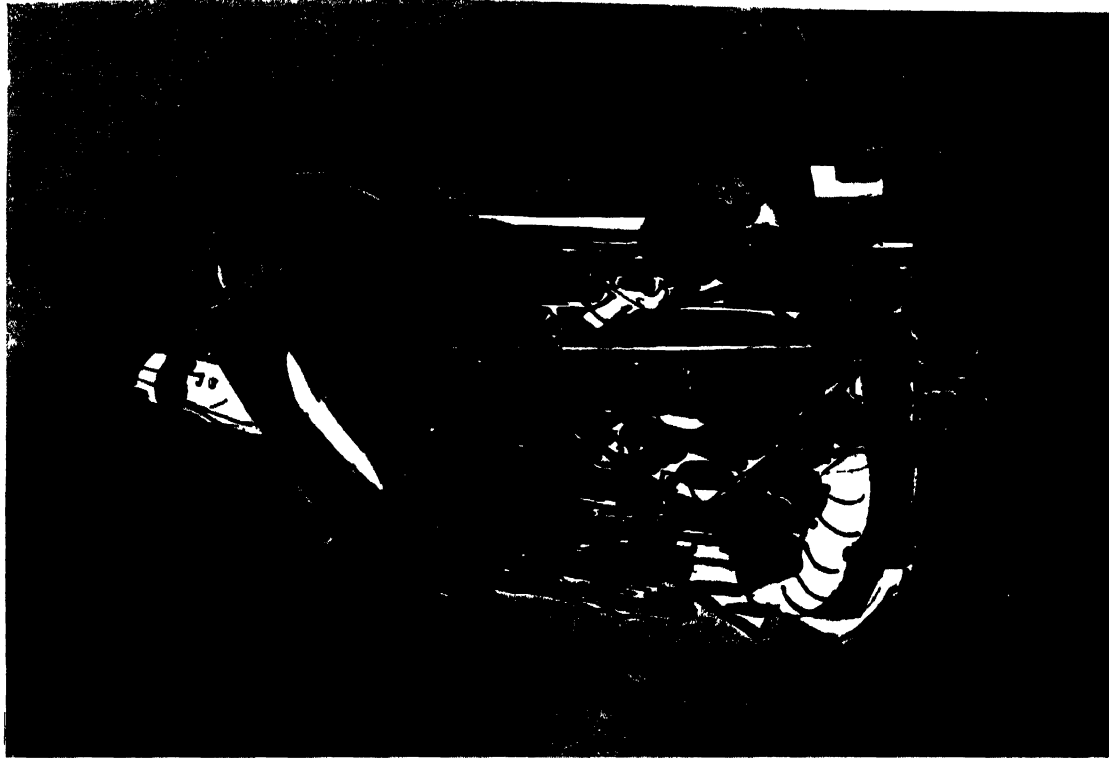


Fig 248 MATRULIN COSTUME SKETCH FOR 'THE INVISIBLE ONE'

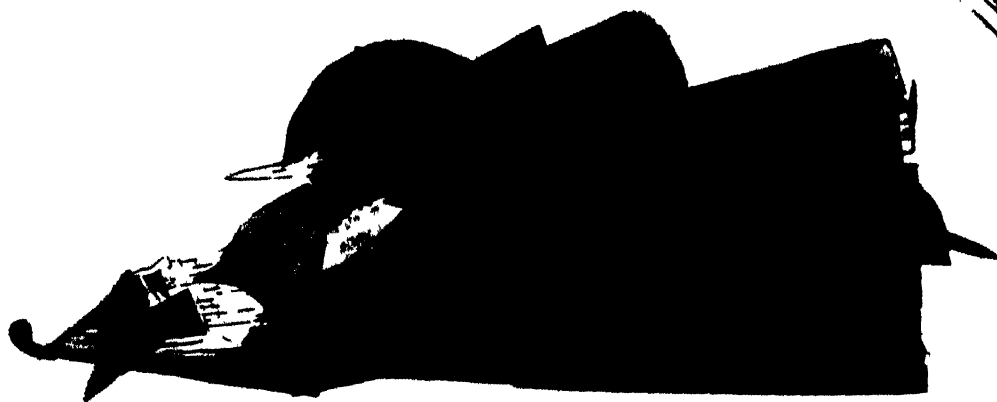


Fig 247 MATRULIN COSTUME SKETCH FOR 'THE INVISIBLE ONE'





Harry



unhappy

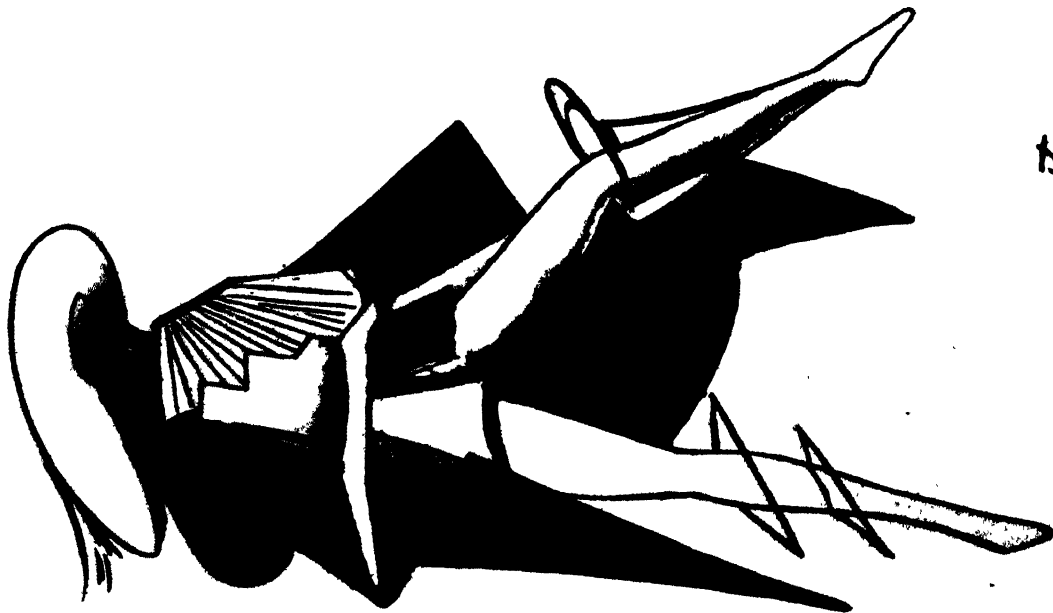


Fig. 251. MATRININ COSTUME SKETCH FOR "THE STONE GUEST"

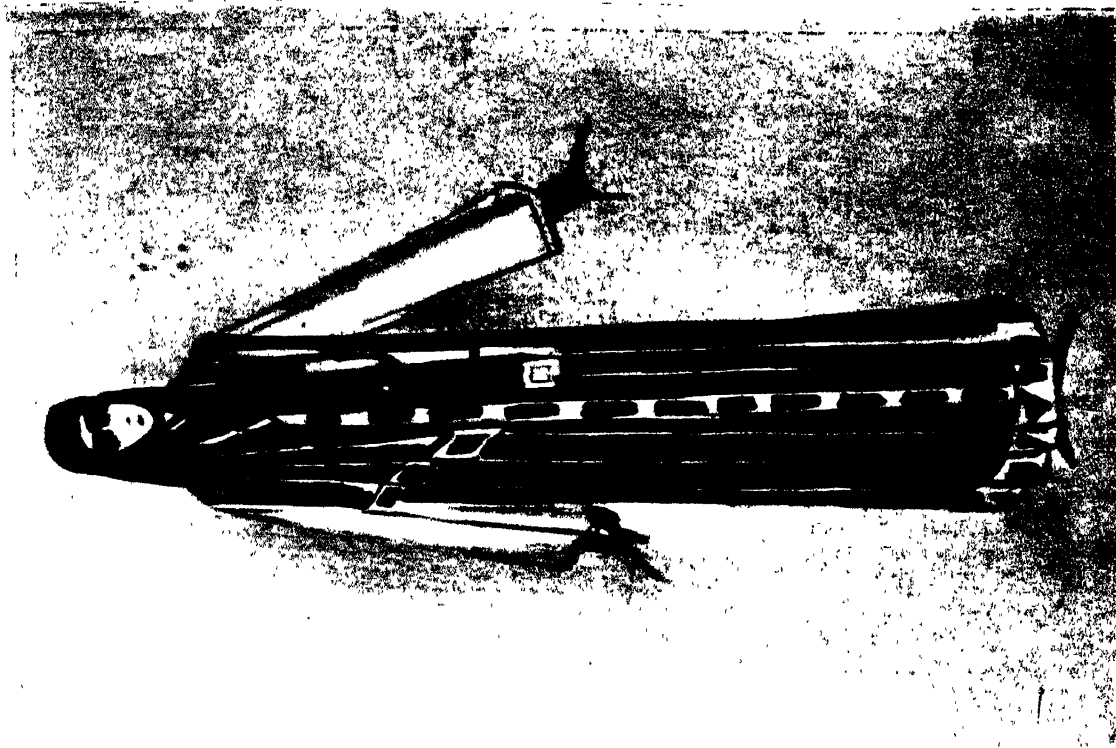


Fig. 252. MATRININ COSTUME SKETCH FOR "THE STORM"



Fig. 253. MATRUNIN: COSTUME SKETCHES FOR "EUGENE ONEGIN"



Fig. 254. F. FEDOROVSKY: "KHOVANTSCHINA"



Fig 255 O AMOSOVA SEEK AND THOU SHALT FIND



Fig 256 J SAVADSKY THE MIRACLE OF ST ANTONY'



Fig. 257. A. LENTULOV: DESIGN FOR "PROMETHEUS"



Fig. 258. B. LENTULOV: "THE STORM"



Fig. 250. A. LENTULOV. "TALES OF HOFFMANN"



Fig. 260. A. LENTULOV. "THE DEMON"

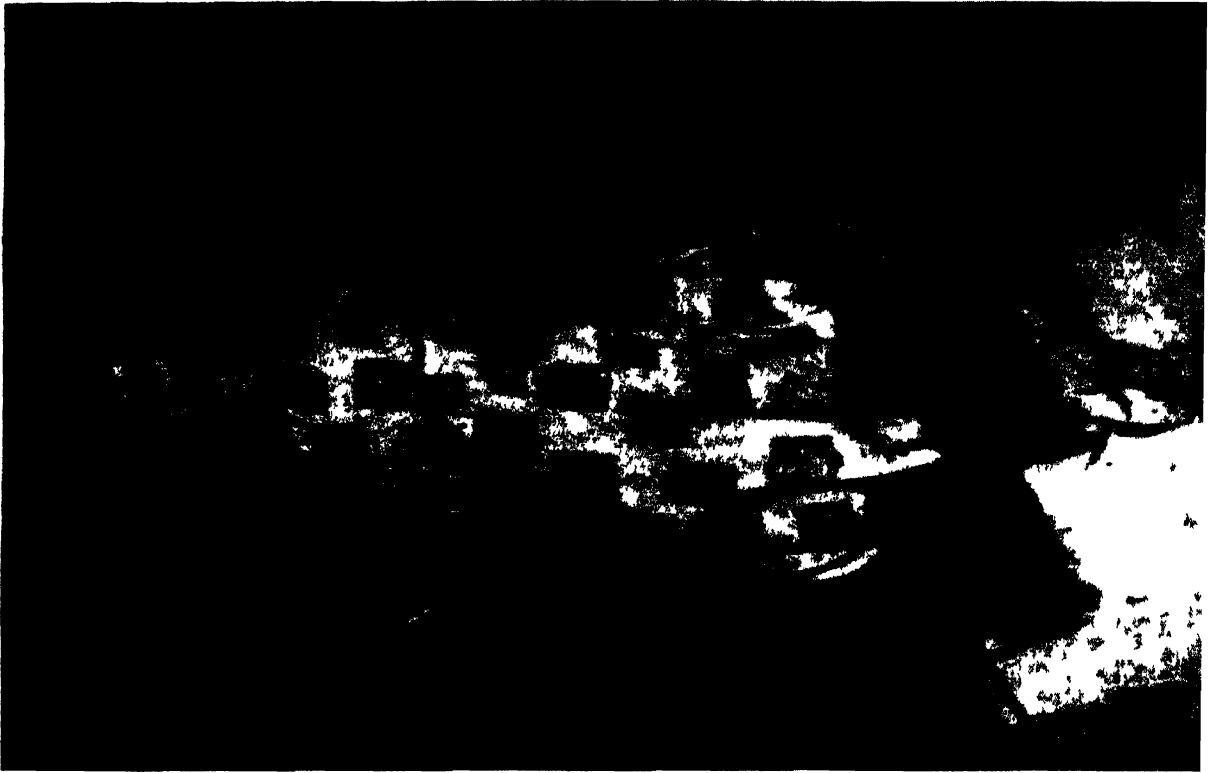




Fig 263. B FERDINANDOV COSTUME FOR "OEDIPUS"



Fig 264. G. YAKULOV DESIGN FOR SCENERY FOR "OEDIPUS"



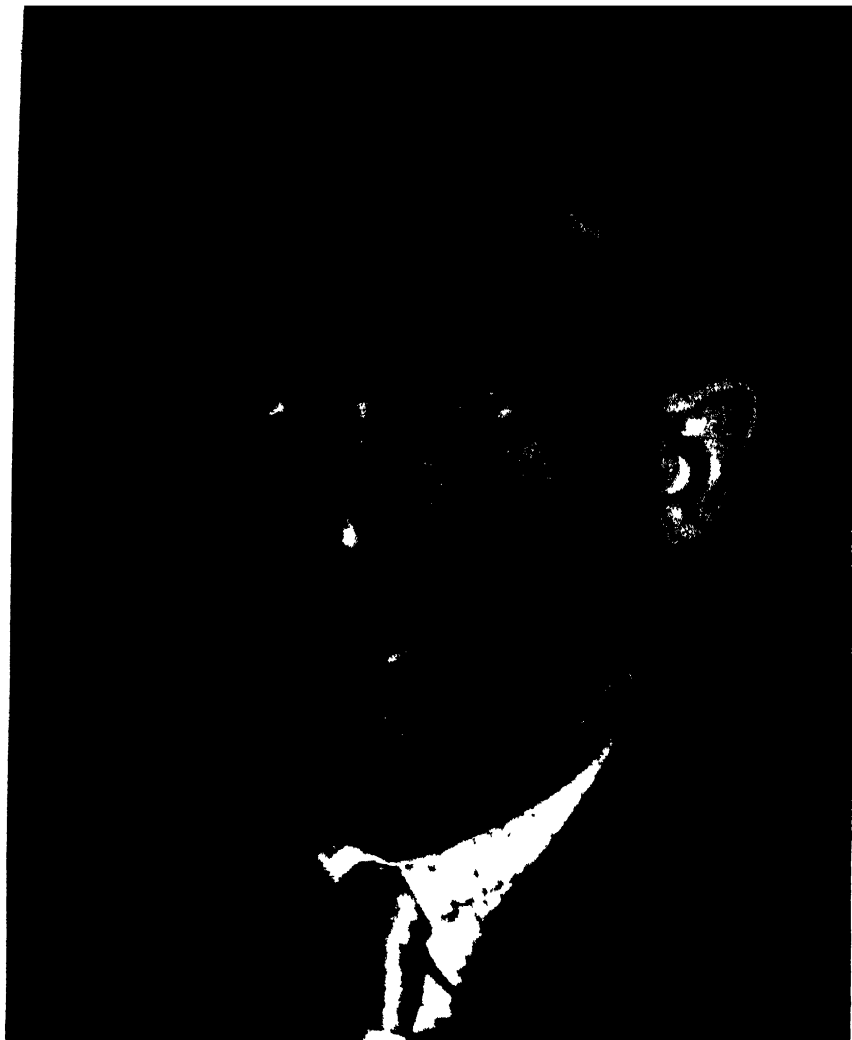


Fig. 205. J. YAKOVLEV (MAYERHOLD THEATRE)



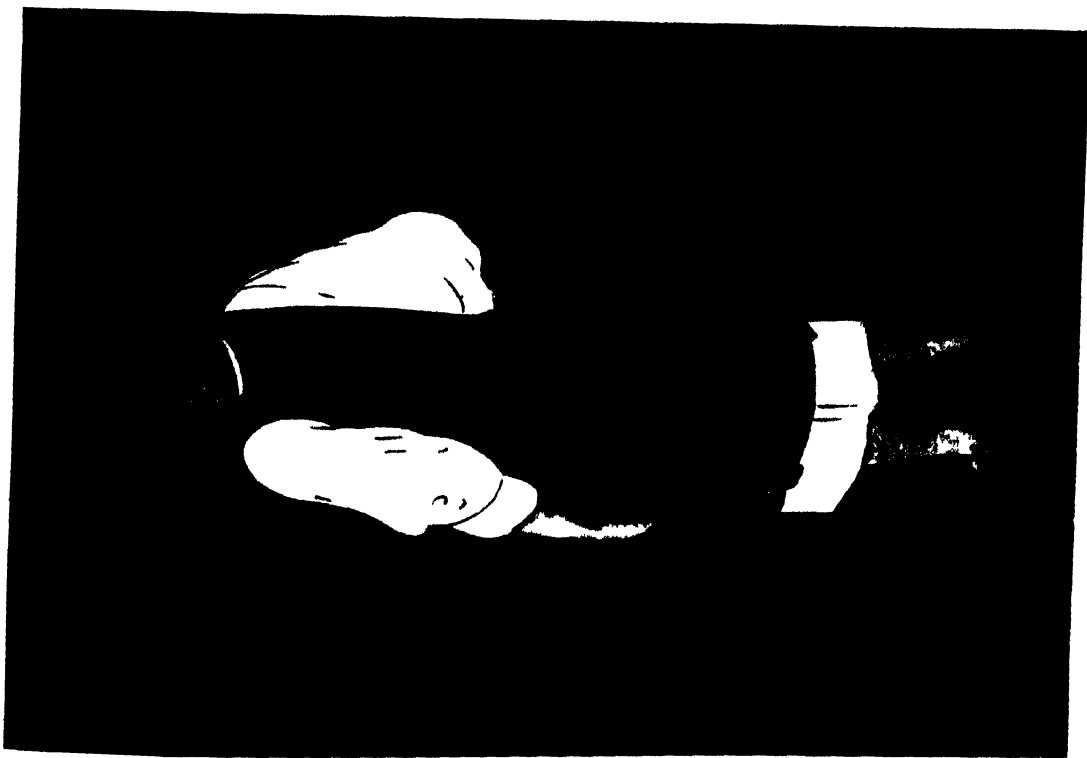


Fig 267 PELENNIN (OSTUME SKETCH FOR THE COFFEE HOUSE

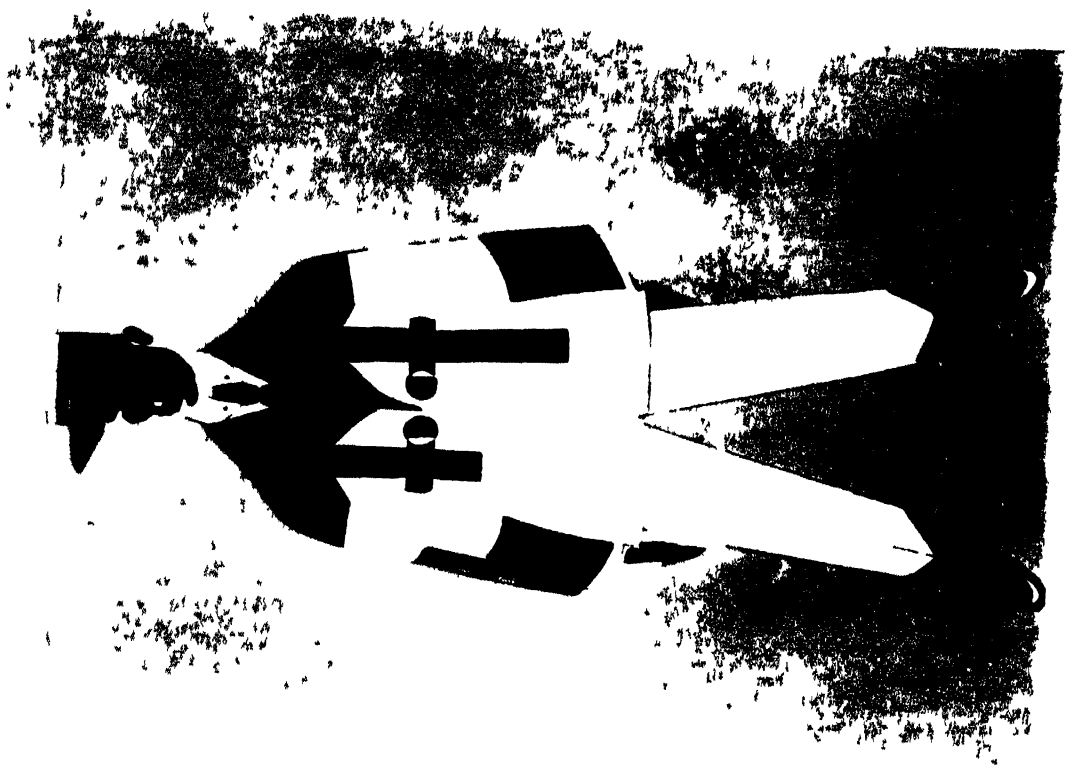


Fig 268 PELENNIN (OSTUME SKETCH FOR THE COFFEE HOUSE"



Fig. 269. YAKULOV: COSTUME MODEL FOR "RIENZI"



Fig. 270. YAKULOV: COSTUME SKETCH FOR "ŒDIPUS"

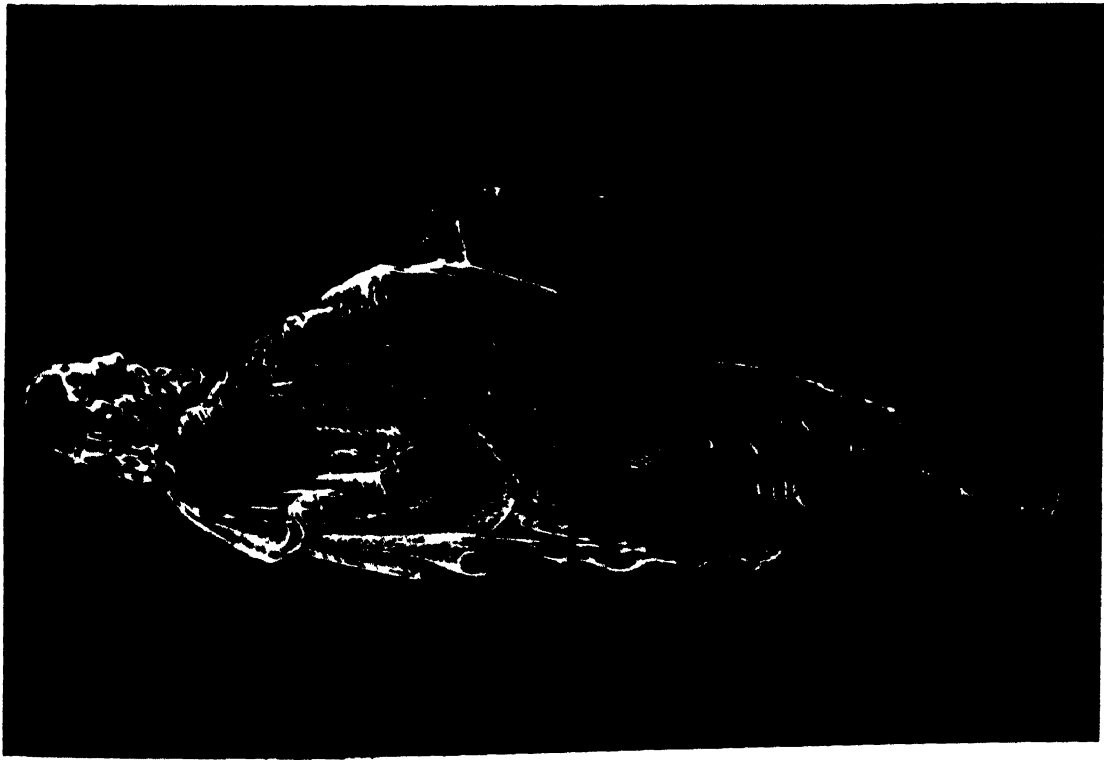


Fig. 271 YAKULOV COSTUME SKETCH FOR "ŒDIPUS"



Fig. 272. YAKULOV COSTUME SKETCH FOR "ŒDIPUS"

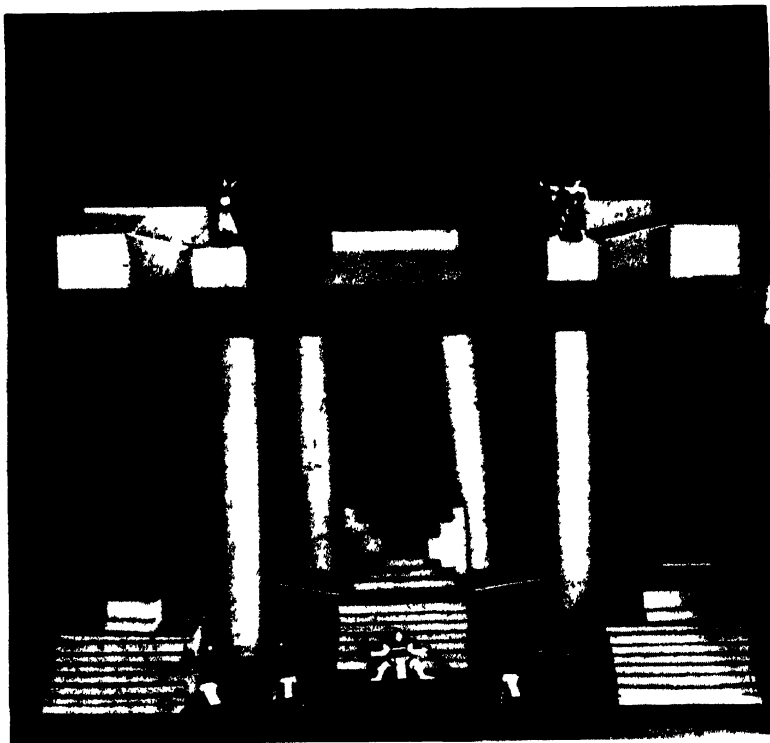


Fig 273 BALLET FROM JOSEPH  
Experimental Theatre Leningrad  
*Model in the Bakrushin Museum*



Fig 274. YAKULOV COSTUME MODELS FOR ' '

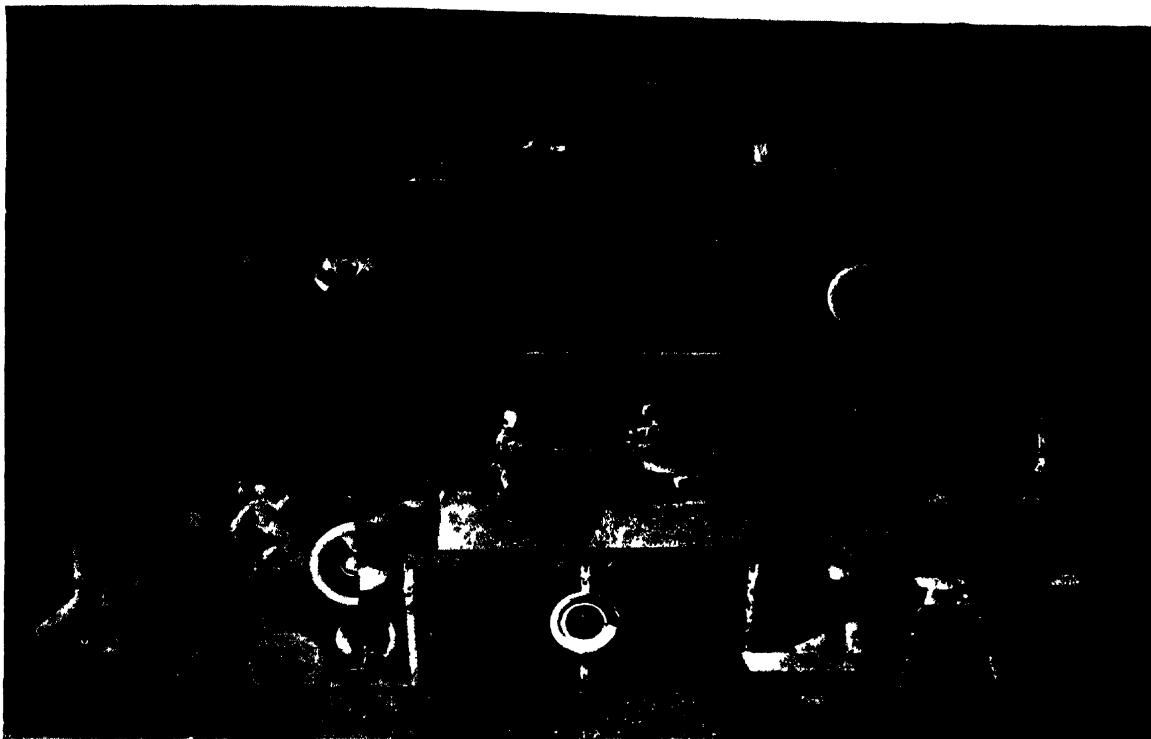


Fig. 275 YAKULOV SCENERY FOR "LE PAS D'ACHÈR"

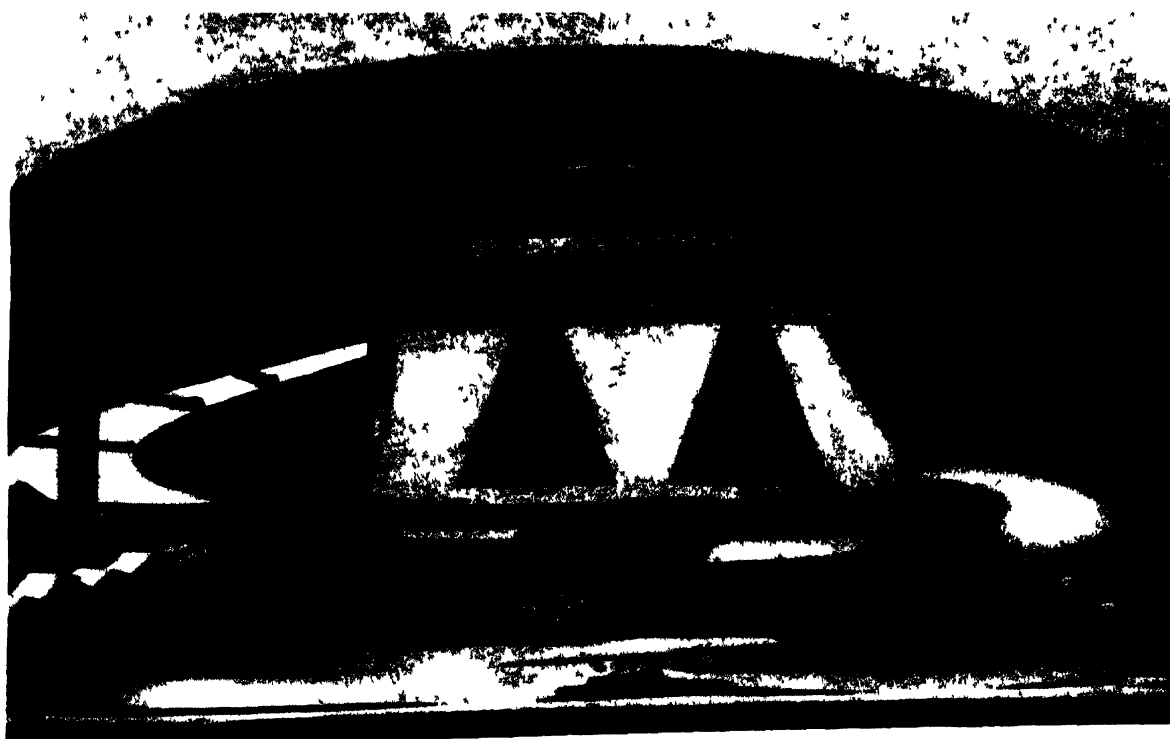


Fig. 276. YAKULOV: SCENERY FOR "THE WANDERING JEW"

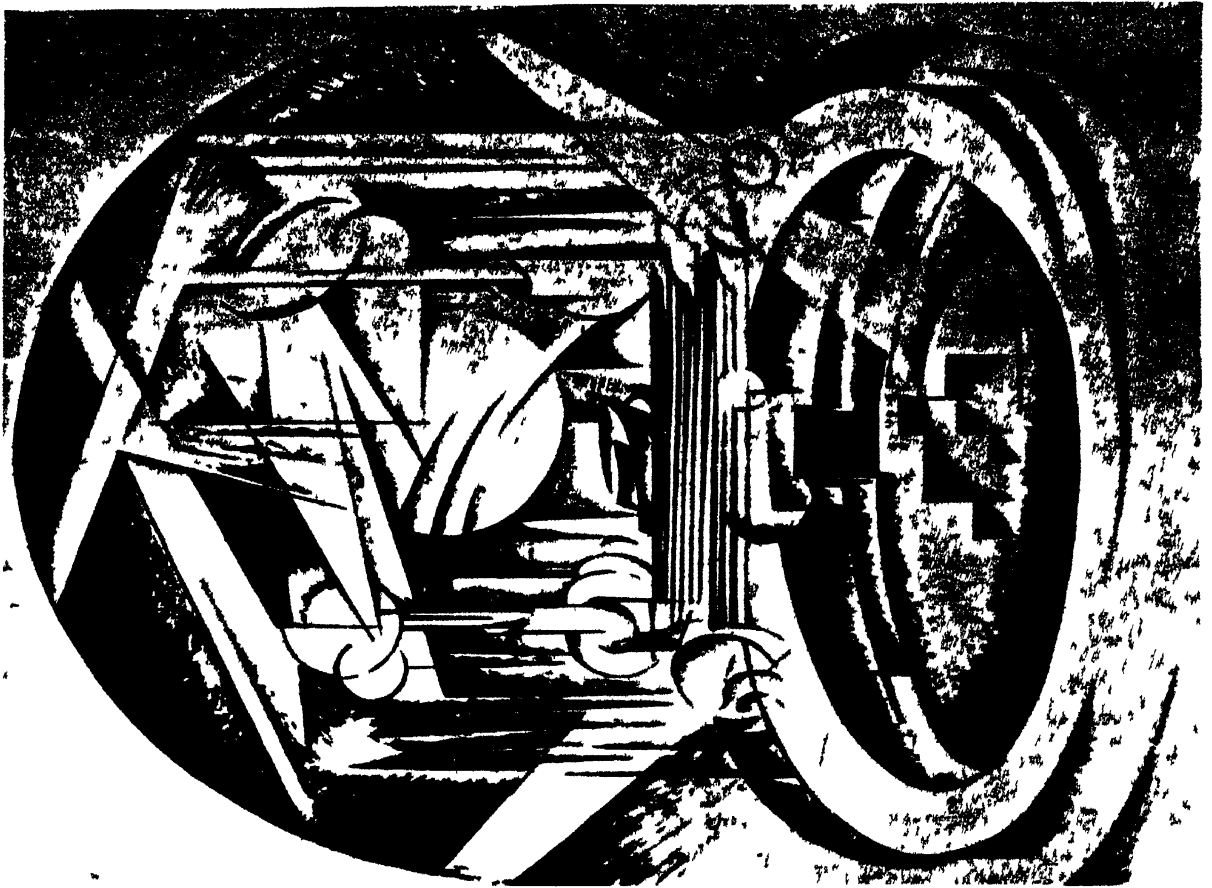




FIG. 270 YAKULOV DESIGN FOR STAGE-SETTING

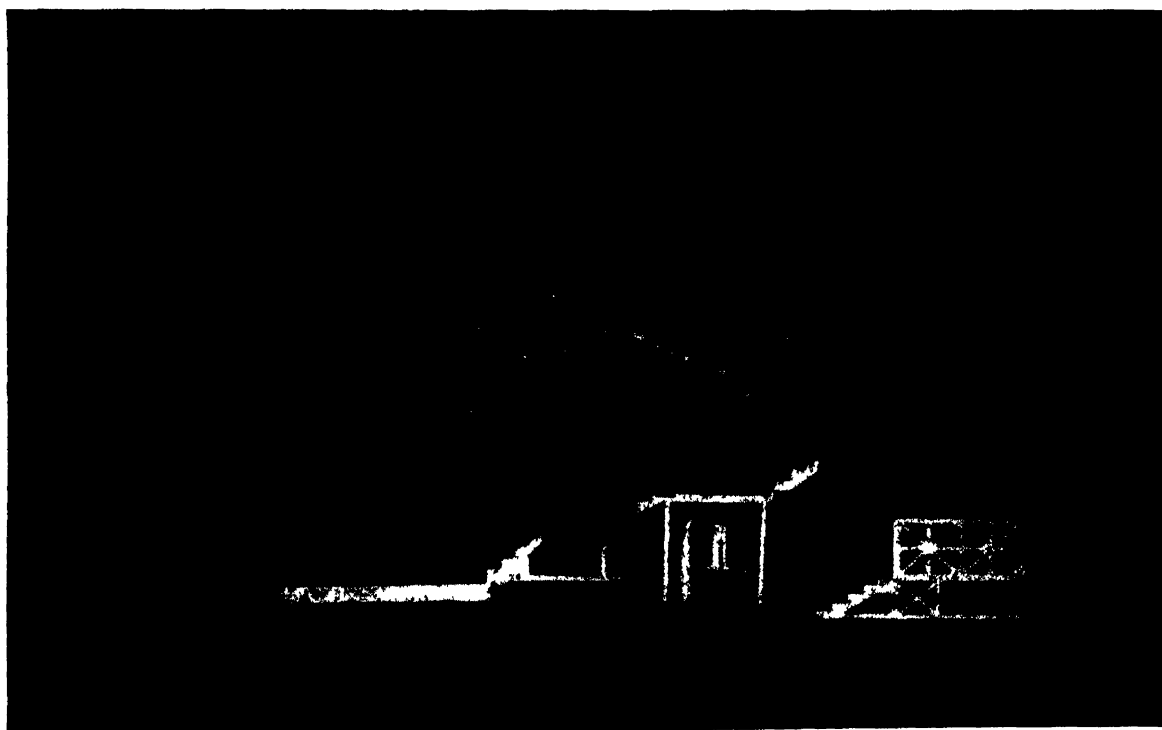


FIG. 280 O. AMOSOV STAGE MODEL FOR "JULIUS CAESAR"





Fig 281 SCENE FROM "LOHENGRIN" Academic State Theatre *Bakuhin Museum, Moscow*

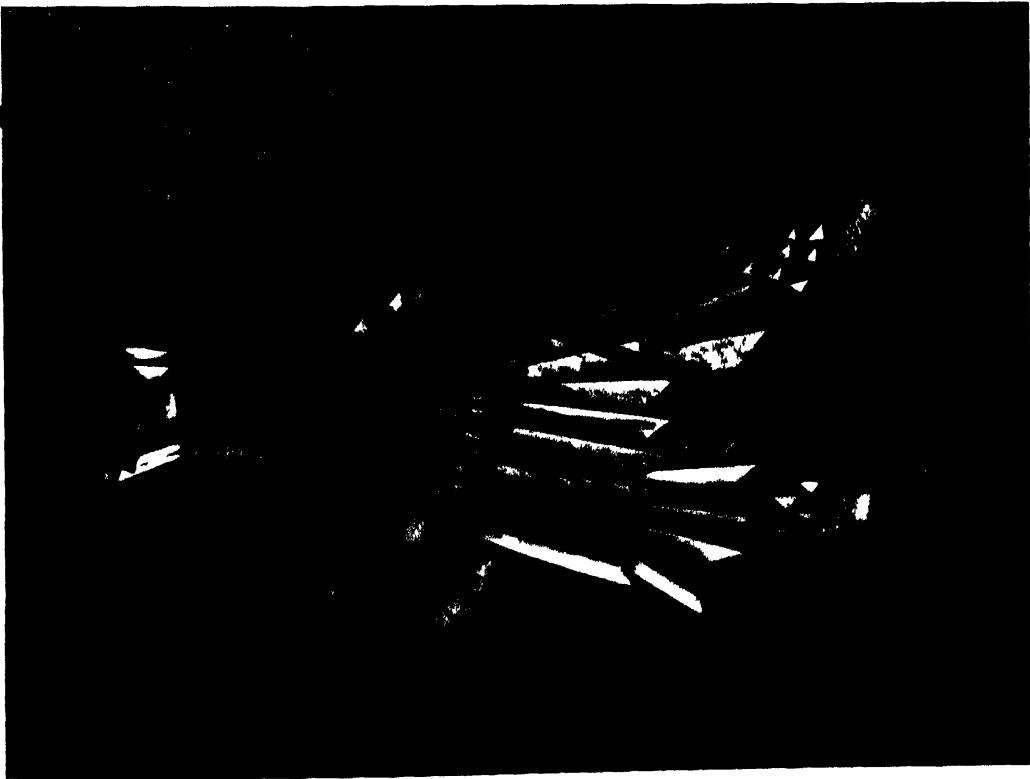


Fig 282. O VINOGRADOVA COSTUME MODEL FOR 'LOHENGGRIN'

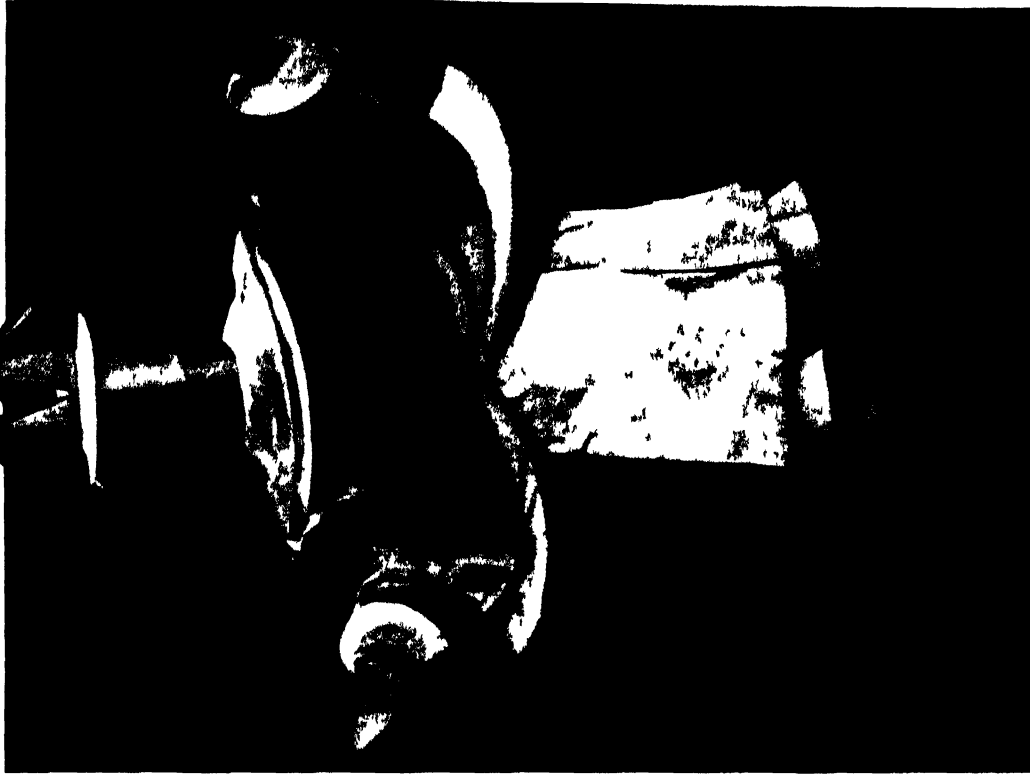


Fig 283. VINOGRADOVA COSTUME MODEL



Fig. 284. FOMINA: STAGE MODEL FOR "GALILEI". Cf. Fig. 223



Fig. 285. FEDOROVSKY: BALLET FROM "GISELLE". New Academic State Theatre

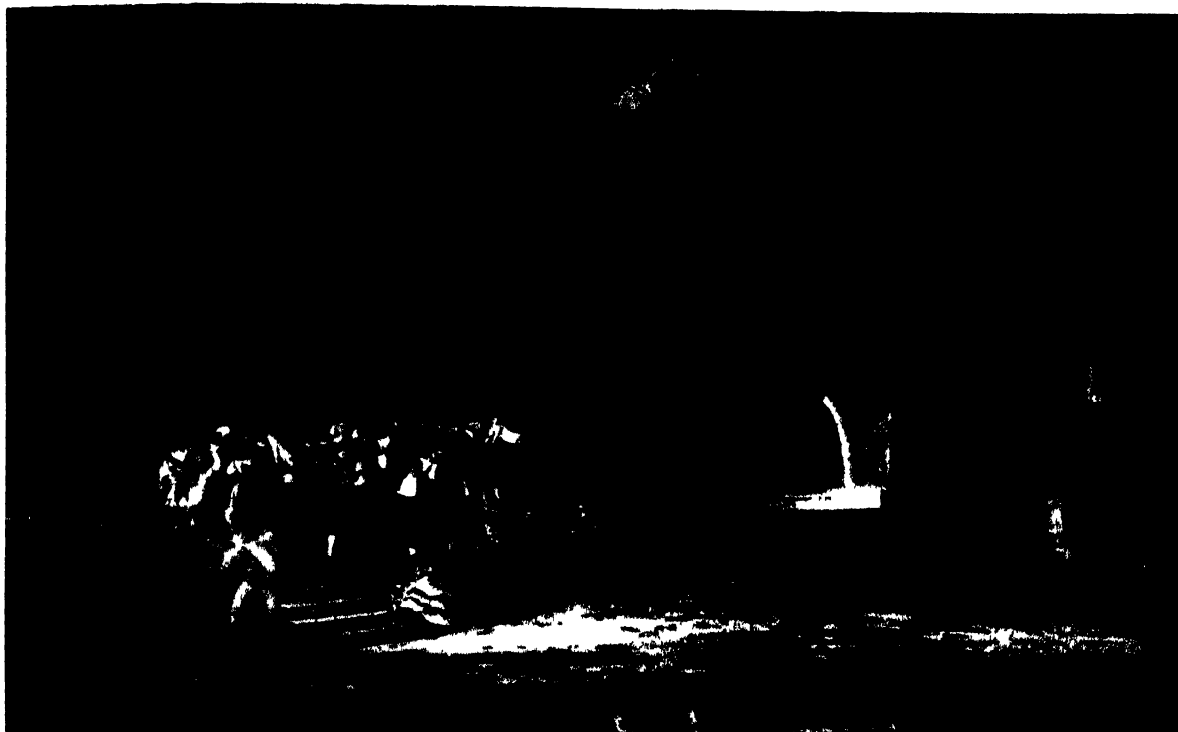


Fig. 286. FIDOROVSKY: "CARMEN"



Fig. 287 FIDOROVSKY: "LOHENGRIN"



Fig 288 J RABINOVITCH THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR



Fig 289 FEDOROVSKY 'KHOVANTSCHINA'. Diaghilev Theatre, Paris

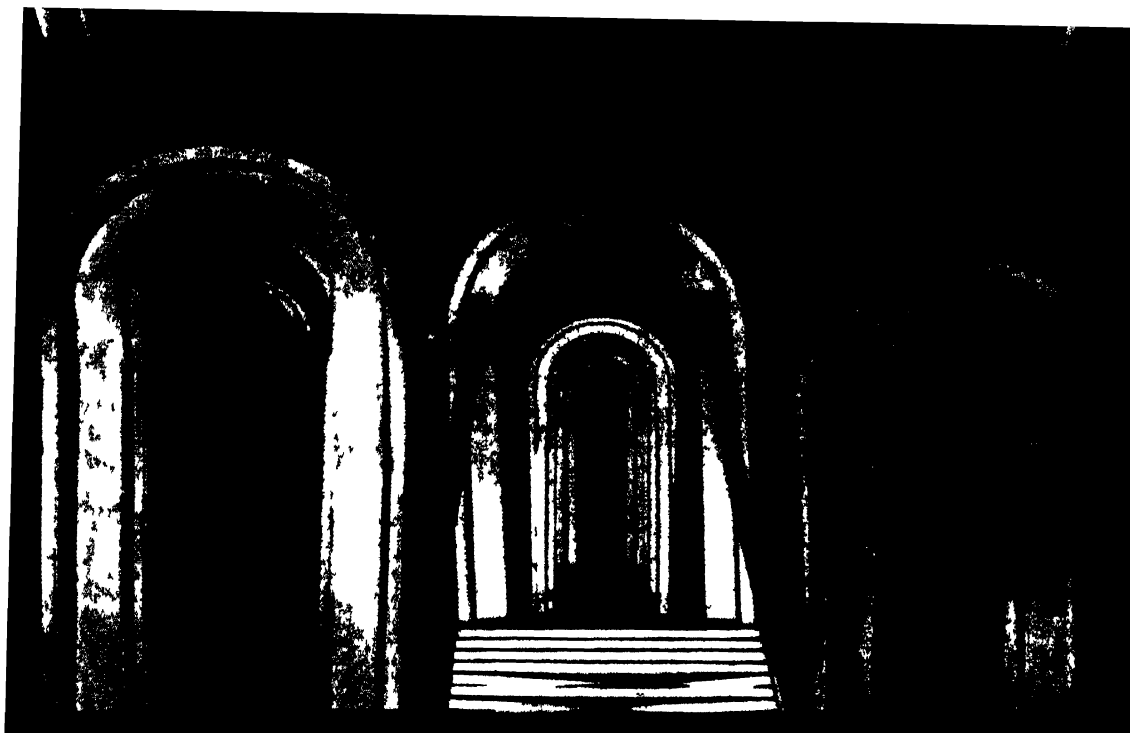


Fig. 290. A. RABINOVITCH „AL LITTA' CONSTRUCTIVIST SETTING FOR CINEMA. *Darwinian Museum, Moscow*



Fig. 291. A. RABINOVITCH CONSTRUCTIVIST SETTING FOR „CARMEN. *Darwinian Museum, Moscow*



Fig. 292. MOD-1. Bakrushin Museum, Moscow



Fig. 293. MATRUNIN: "THE STORM". Chahapin Studio



Fig. 294. TOMINA: "FAUST"



Fig. 295. YAKULOV: "RIENZI"







Fig 296 ANDREI ZHDANOV CONSTRUCTIVIST SETTING. *National Museum, Vienna*



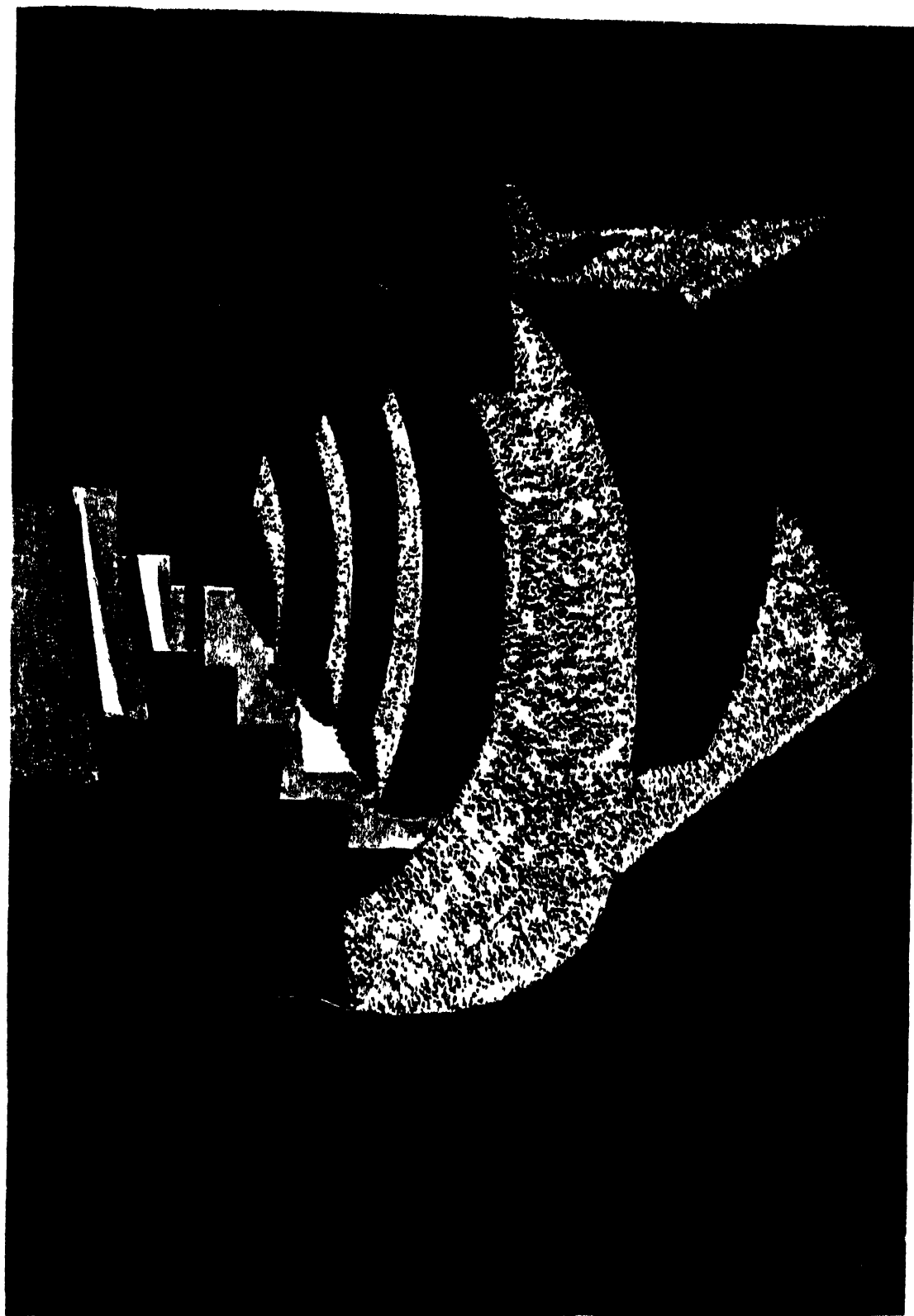


Fig. 297. ANDRELENKO · CONSTRUCTIVIST SETTING





Fig. 298. ANDRIIUSKO. FIGURE STYDILS



**REACTION AND THE BEGINNINGS OF ANALYSIS  
(GOTHIC INFLUENCE)**





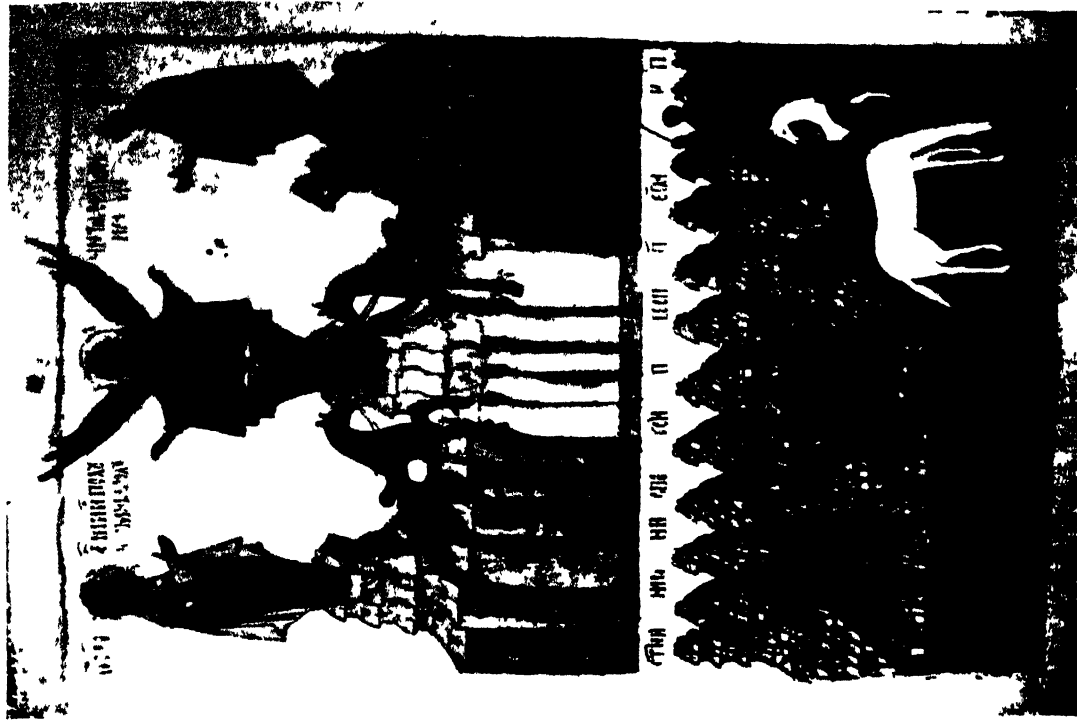


Fig 300 IKON BACKGROUND WITH FIGURES AND OBJECTS, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY



Fig 299 COD SLAV 5, APOCALYPSE FOL 24V  
National Library, Vienna



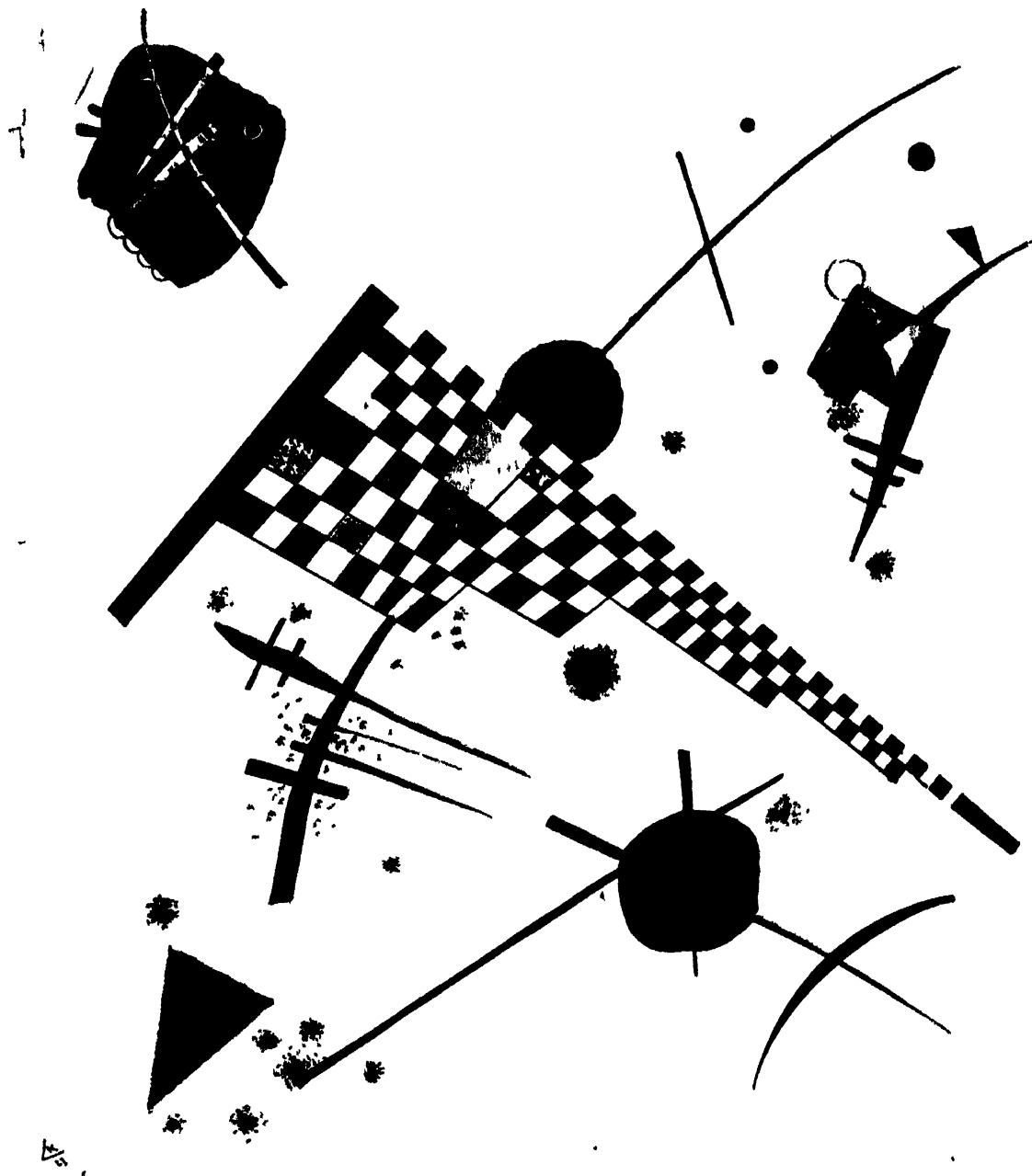


Fig. 301 W KANDINSKY WATER-COLOUR SKETCH *Albertina Museum Vienna*



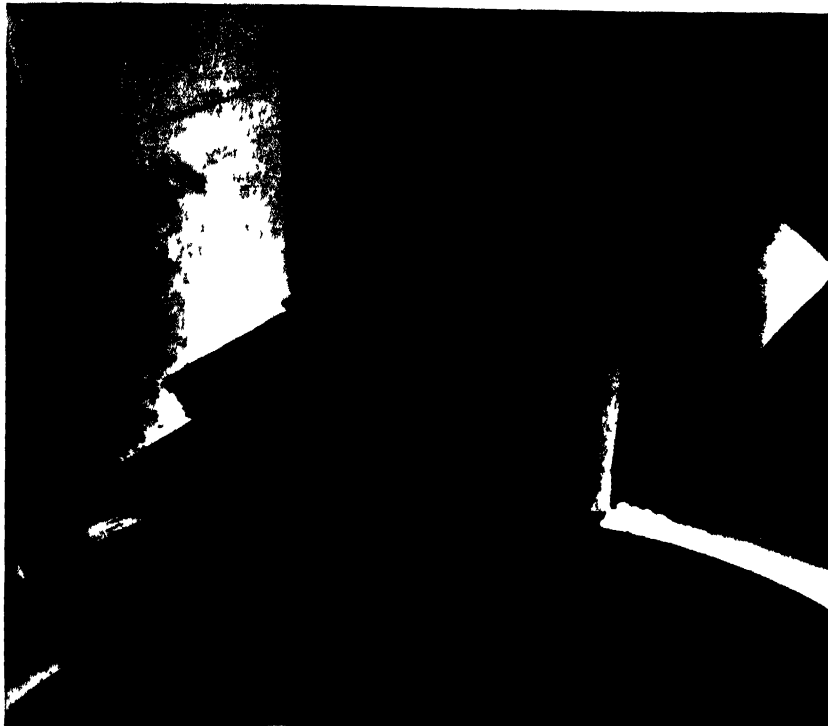


Fig 302 MATRUSIN SCENIC DESIGN

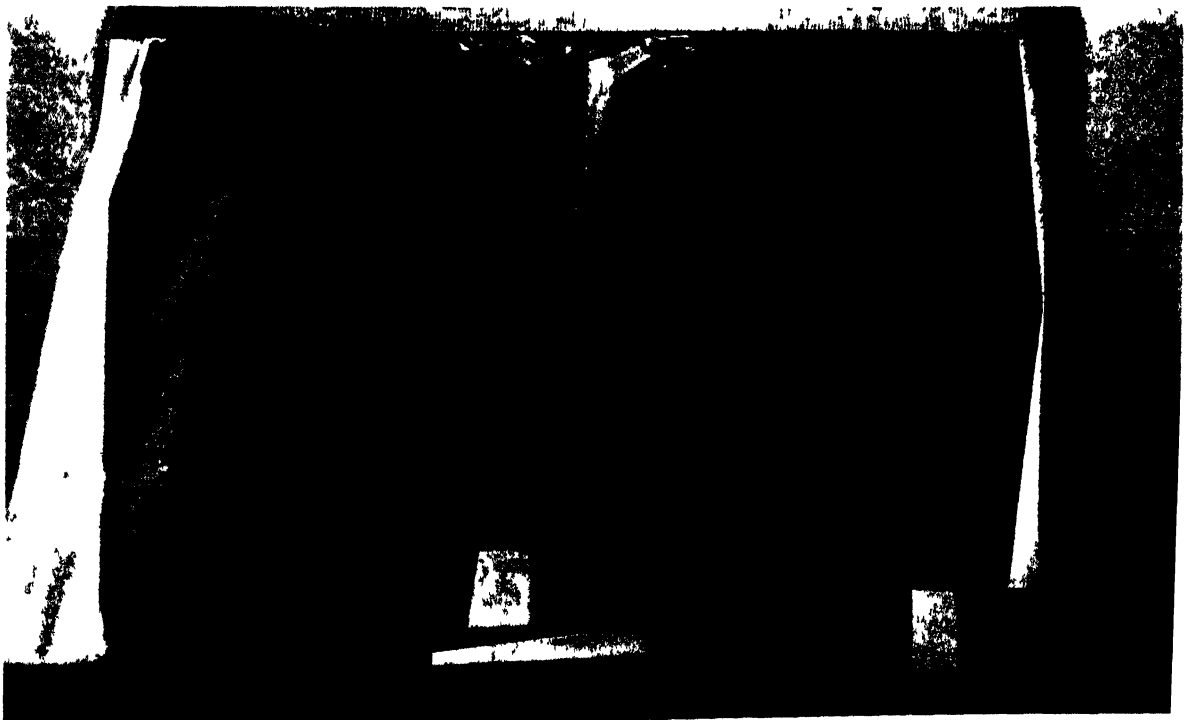


Fig 303 PLENKIN SCENIC DESIGN FOR 'LE CARNAVAL'

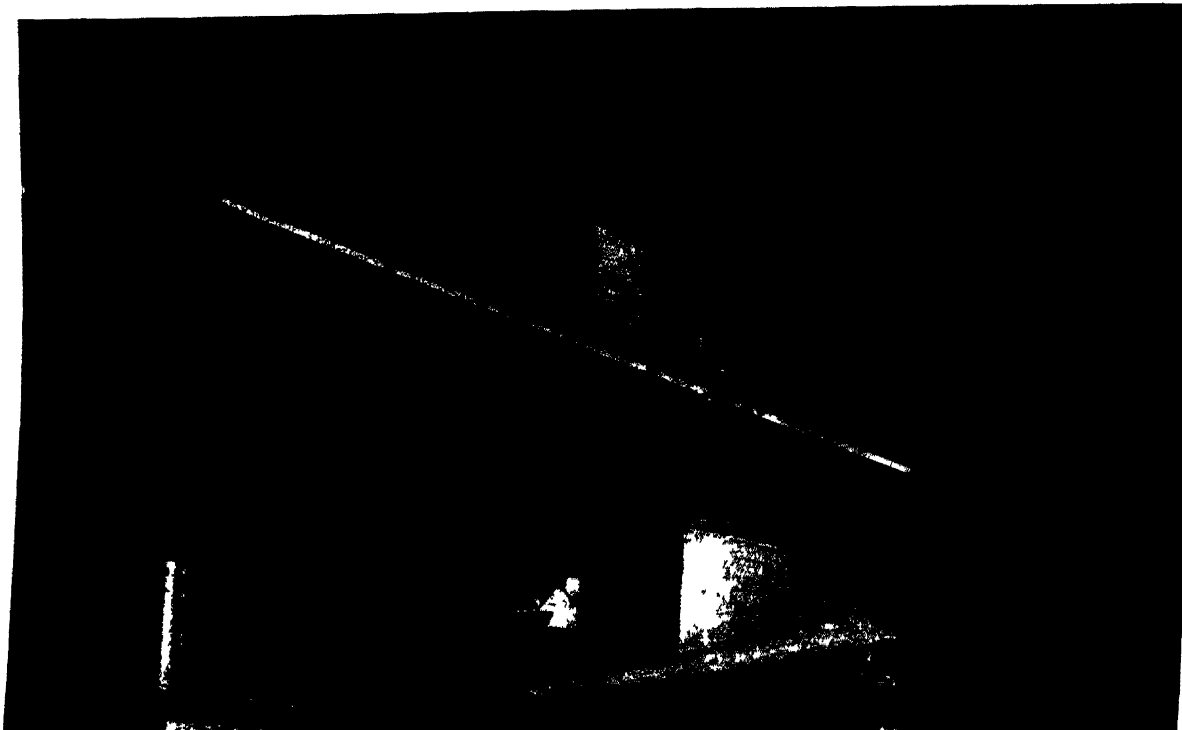


Fig. 304. TATLIN: MODEL STAGE



Fig. 305. B. VIALKOV: CONSTRUCTIVIST SETTING FOR "THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO"



Fig 306 IATIN MODEL FOR SCENERY



Fig 307 IATIN SCENIC SKETCHES FOR A REVOLUTIONARY THEATRE





## SMALLER THEATRES ON THE ANALYTICAL SYSTEM





Fig. 305. VACHANGOV ON HIS DEATHBED

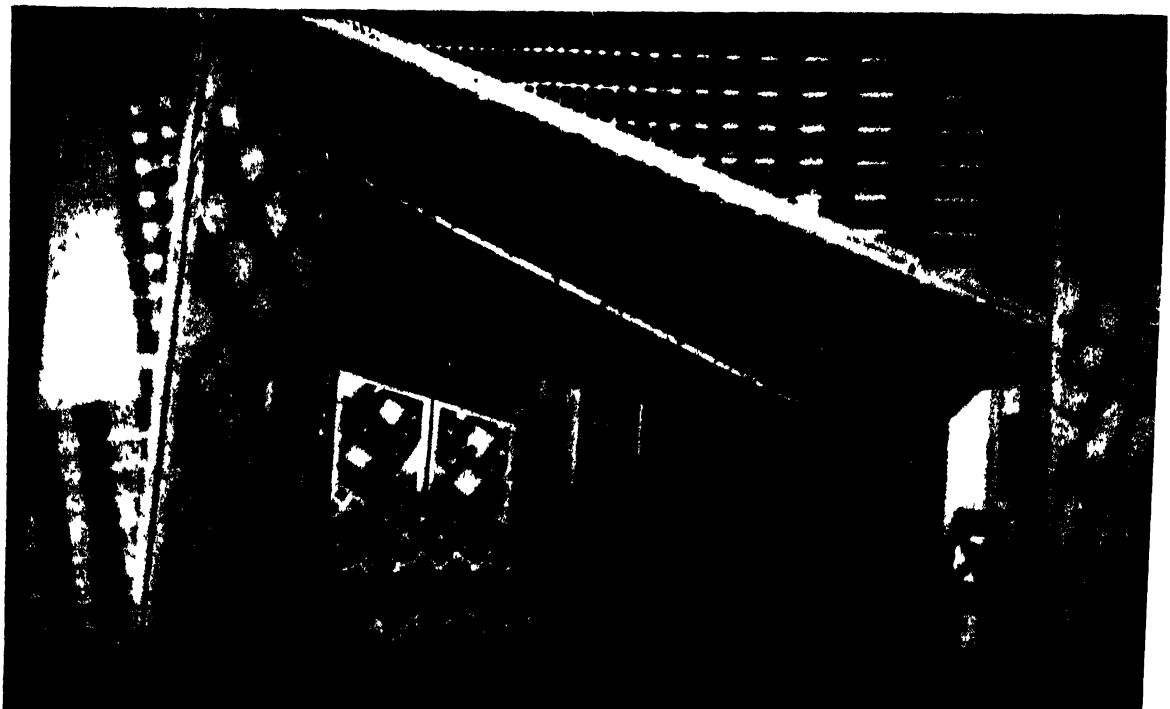


Fig. 309. VACHTANGOV "THE SPIDER". Bakrushin Museum.

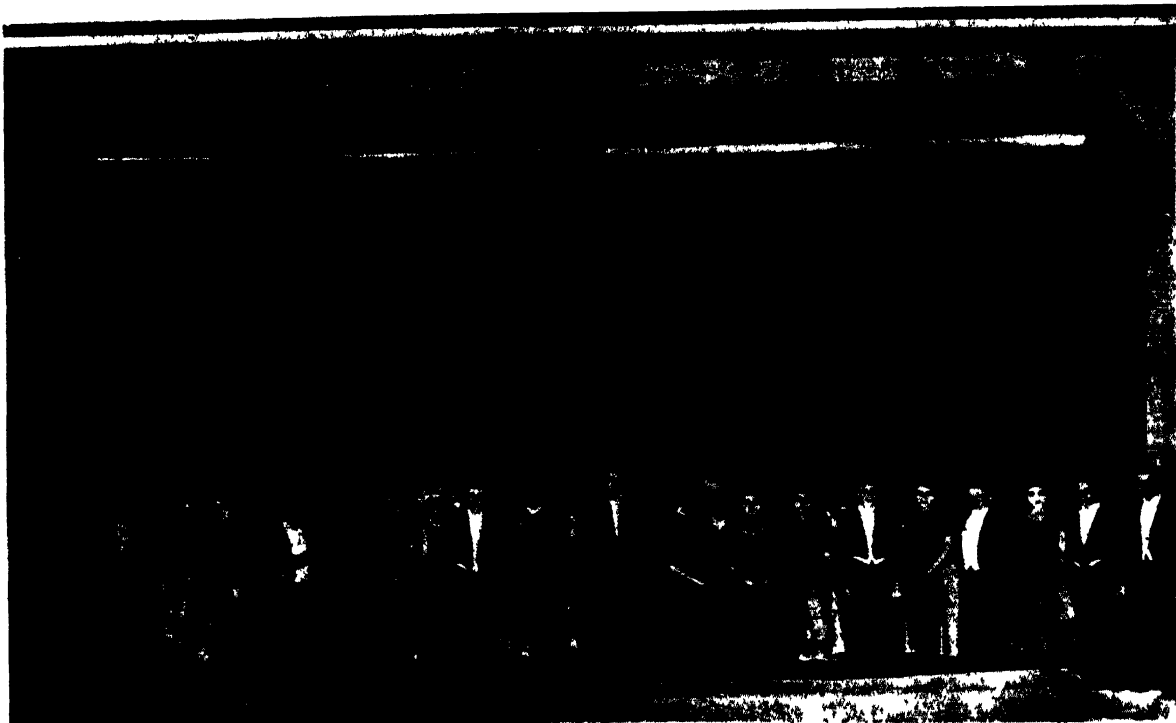


Fig 310 VACHTANGOV PROLOGUE TO "TURANDOT"



Fig. 311. VACHTANGOV. "TURANDOT". IN FRONT OF THE CURTAIN



Fig 312 VACHTANGOV "TURANDOT" ACTION

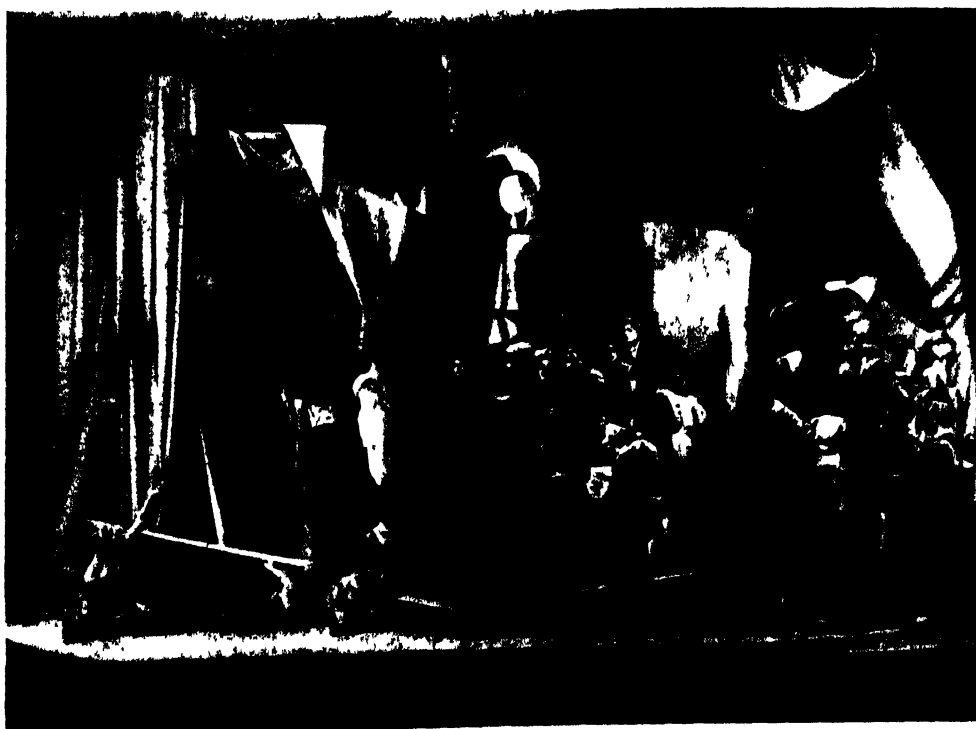


Fig. 313. VACHTANGOV "TURANDOT": ENSEMBLE

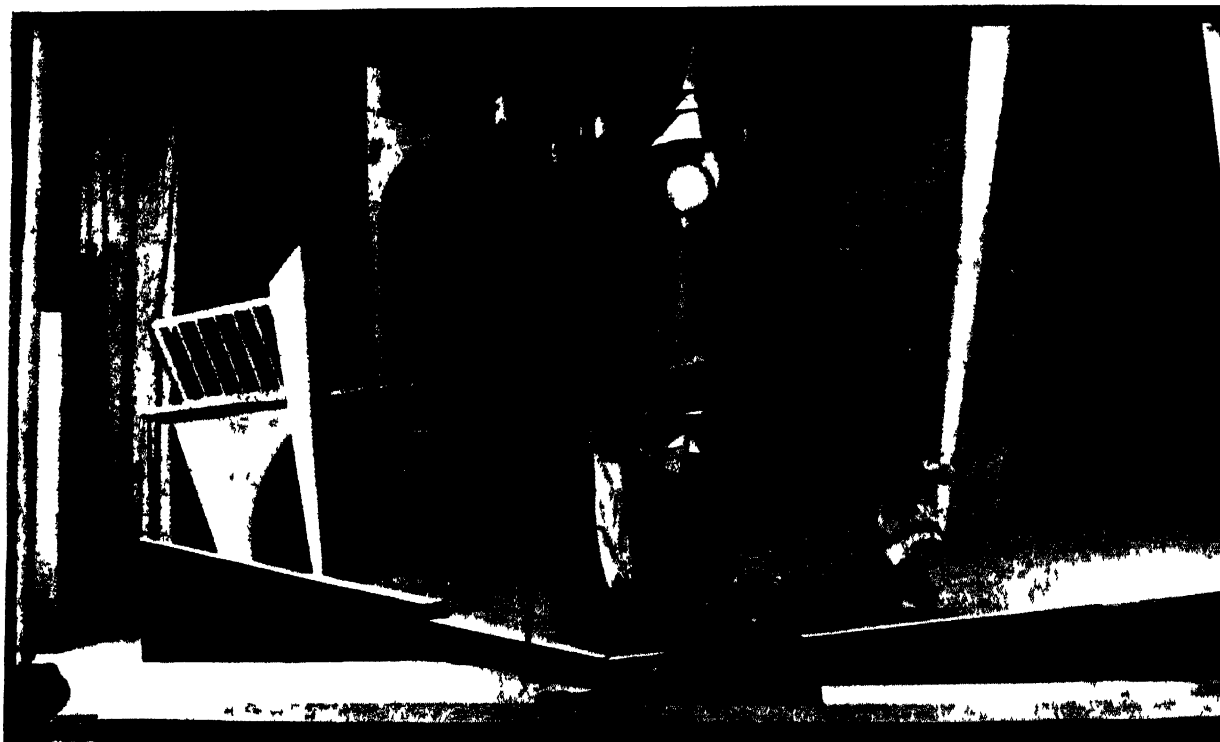


Fig 314 VACHTANGOV AND NIVINSKY SCENIC STRUCTURE FOR TURANDOT



Fig 315 VACHTANGOV SCENIC DETAIL FROM "TURANDOT"



FIG 316. V ACHTANGOV COSTUME FOR PRINCE KALAF IN 'TURANDOT'

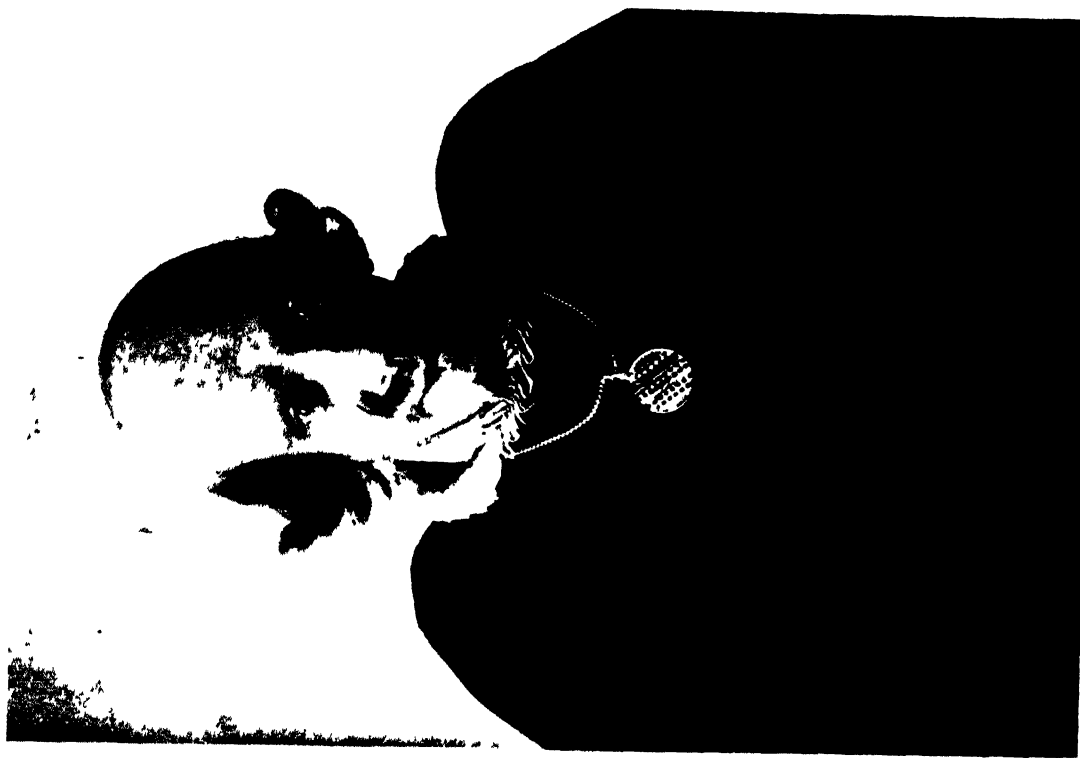


FIG 317. MICHAEL TCHERKOV



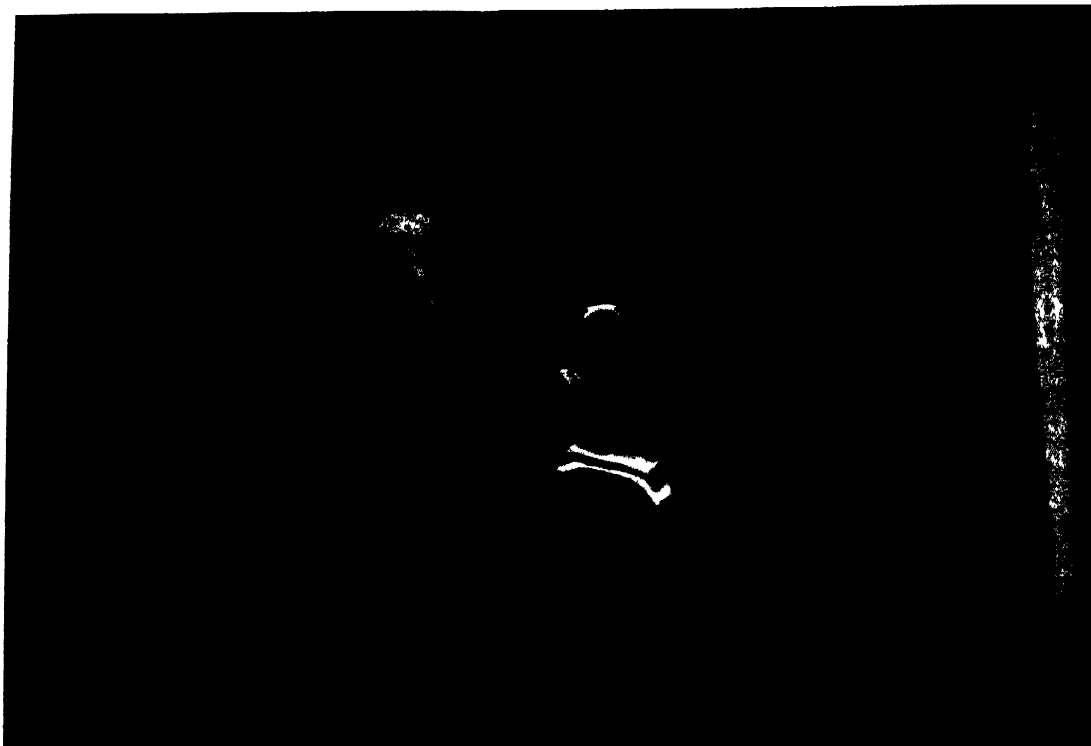


Fig. 318. SCENE FROM "TURANDOT". Vachtangov Theatre  
*Photo by Dr Gregor, taken during the performance*

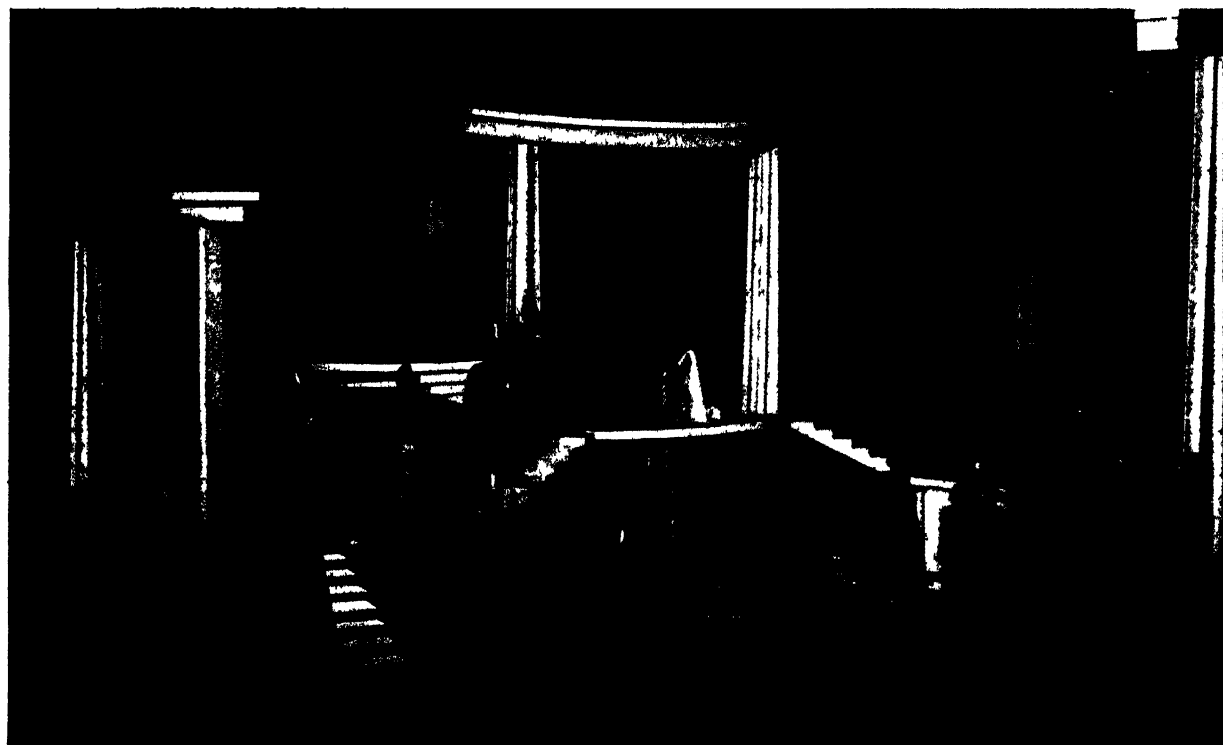


Fig. 319. J. RABINOVITCH: "LYSISTRATA"  
 Art Theatre, Moscow

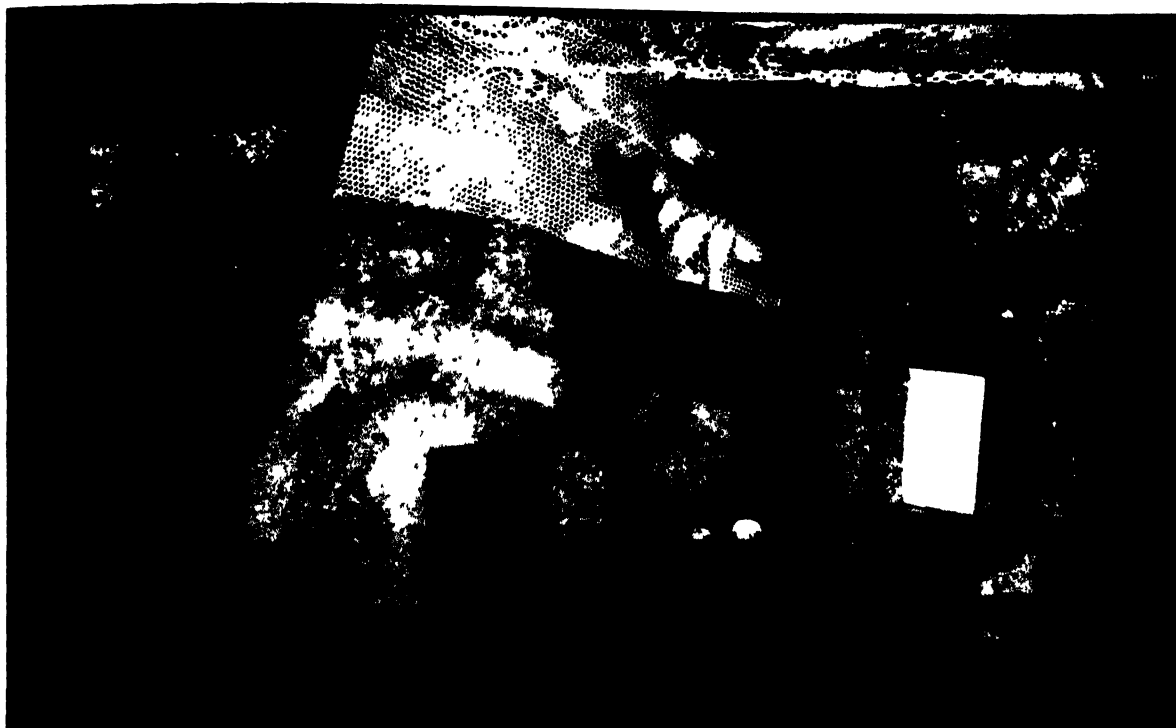


Fig. 320 A. RABINOVITCH "TRUTH IS GOOD, BUT LUCK IS BLTIPR"

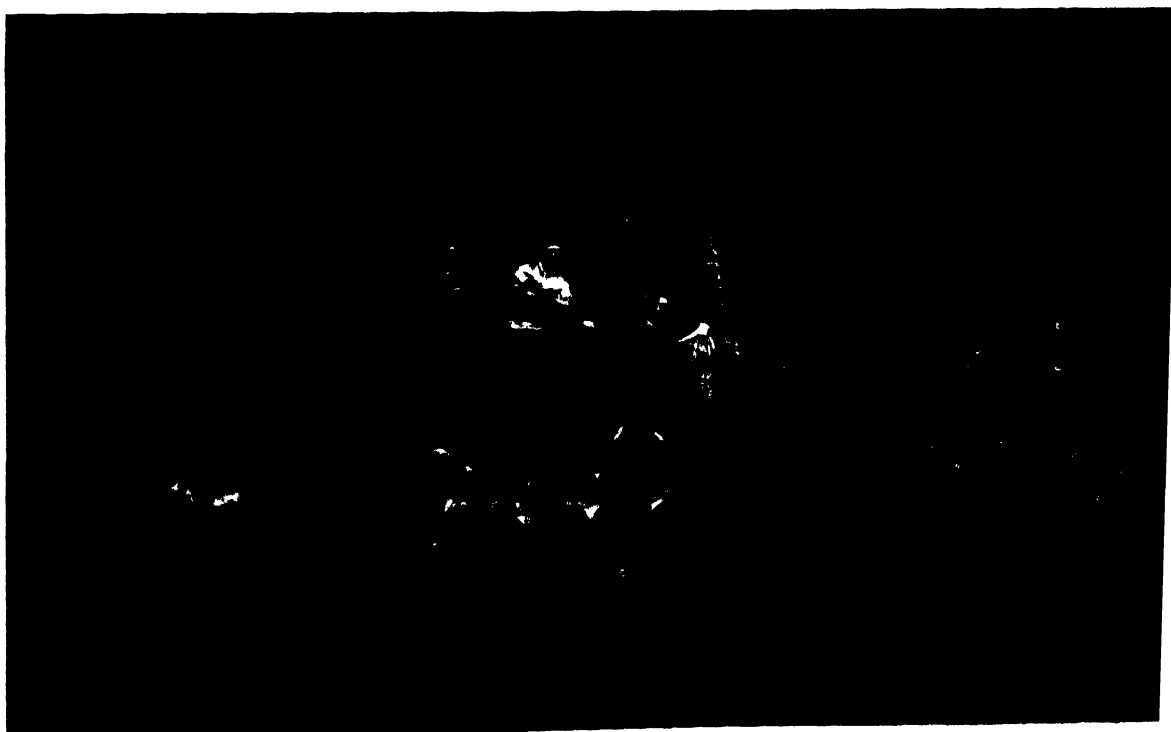


Fig. 321. A RABINOVITCH: "THE MAGICIAN"  
Jewish Kamerny Theatre

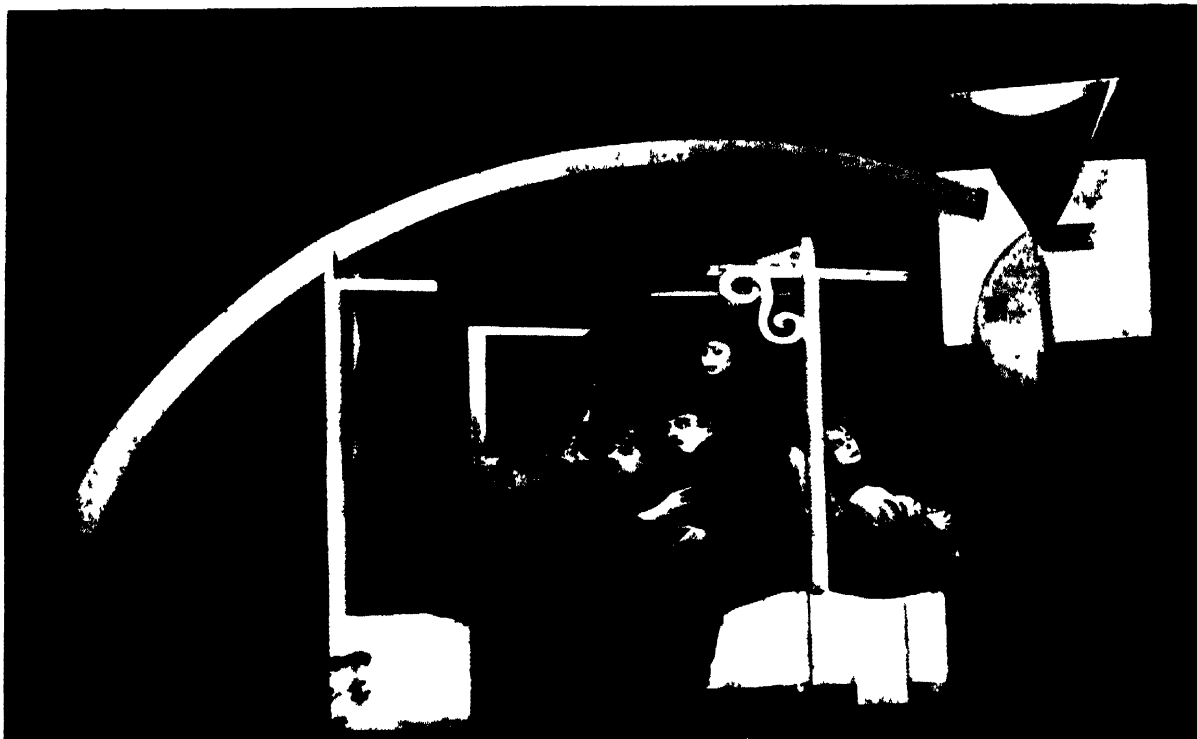


Fig. 322. M. CHAGAL · "THE DETECTIVES". Jewish Kamerny Theatre



Fig 323. SCENE FROM "TROUADEC". Jewish Kamerny Theatre  
*Photo by Dr Gregor, taken during the performance*



Fig 324 SCENE FROM "THE DYBBUK" Habima Theatre (Berlin Company)  
*Photo by Dr Hans Bohm*



Fig 325 SCENE FROM "THE DYBBUK" Habima Theatre  
*Photo by Dr Hans Bohm*



Fig 326 SCENE FROM "THE DYBBUK". Habima Theatre



[Fig 327 SCENE FROM "THE DYBBUK". Habima Theatre

LARGER THEATRES ON THE ANALYTICAL SYSTEM





Fig. 328. VSEVOLOD I. MAYERHOLD



Fig. 329. V. SHESTAKOV "Theatre of the Revolution"





Fig 330 STAGE FOR ANY SORT OF REVOLUTIONARY PLAY



Fig 331 V. SHESTAKOV "SPARTACUS" ACTION Theatre of the Revolution



Fig 332 N. KOMARUKOV "DON JUAN'S RETURN" Theatre of the Revolution

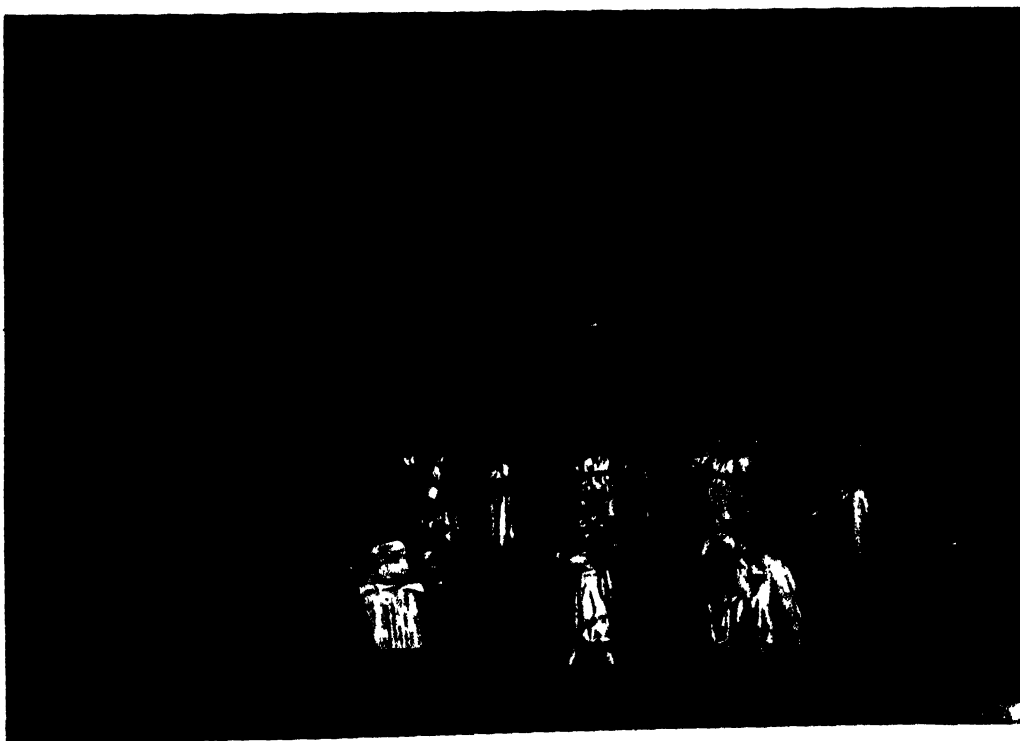


Fig. 333. SCENE FROM "DON JUAN'S RETURN" Mayerhold Theatre

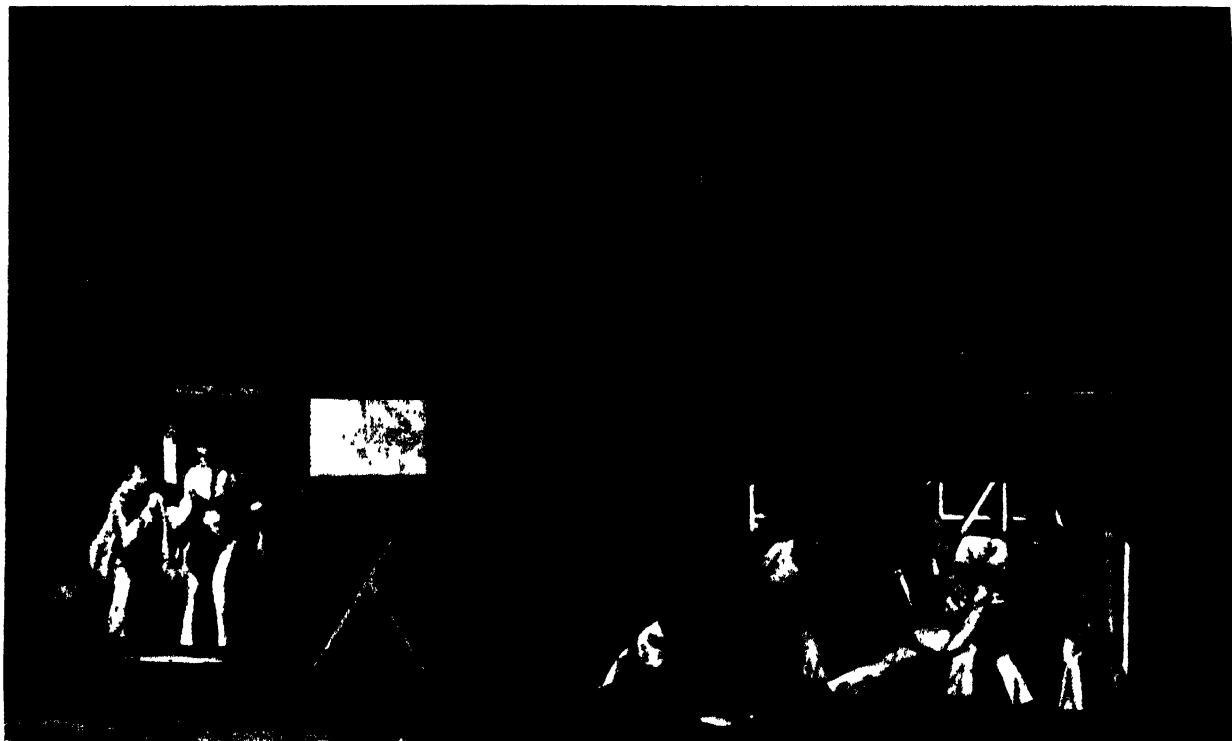


Fig. 334. SCENE FROM "THE MAGNIFICENT CUCKOLD," BY CROMMELYNK. Mayerhold Theatre. Produced

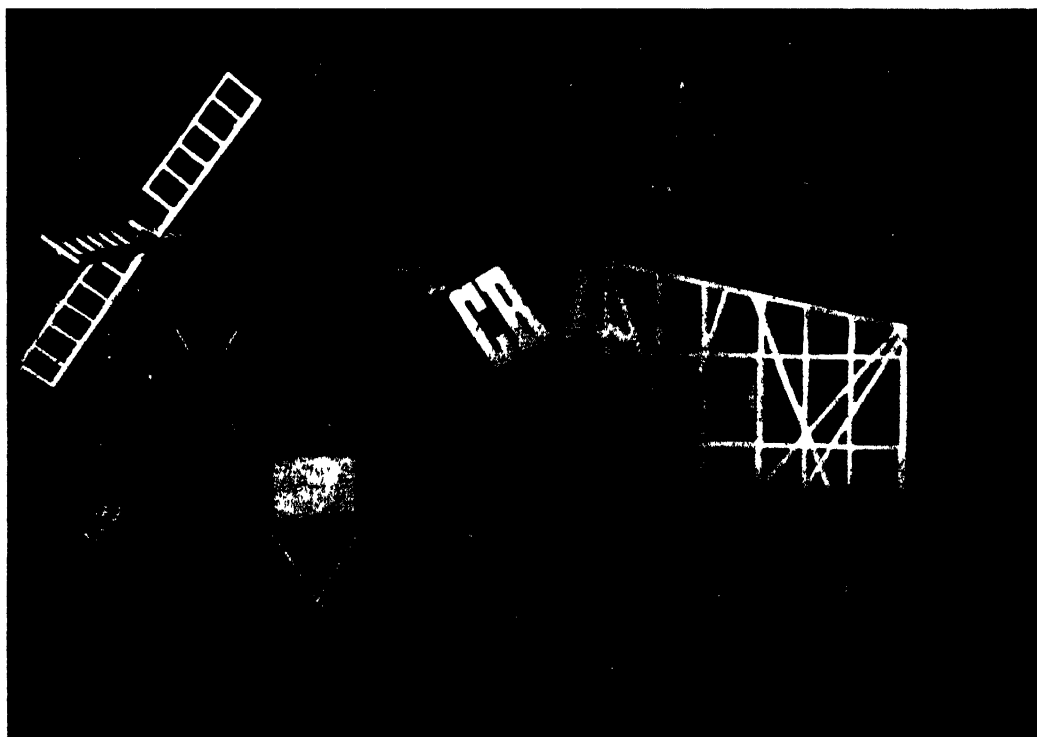


Fig. 335. SCENE FROM "THE MAGNIFICENT CUCKOLD". Mayerhold Theatre

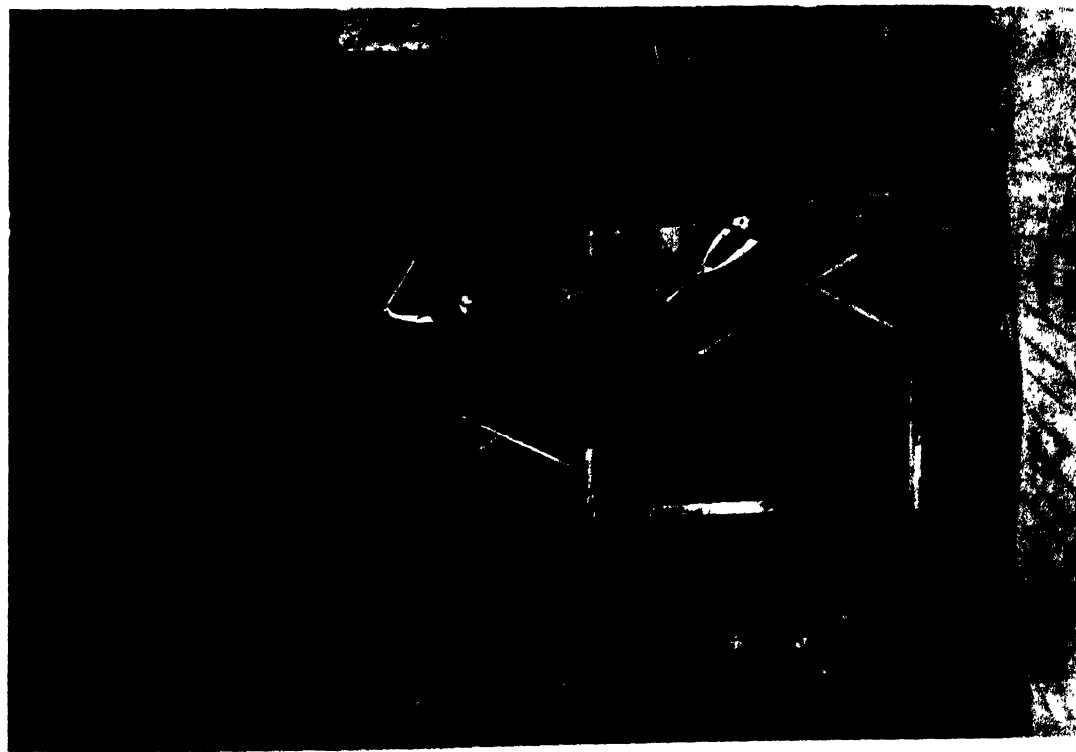


Fig. 336. "THE CUCKOLD": ACTION

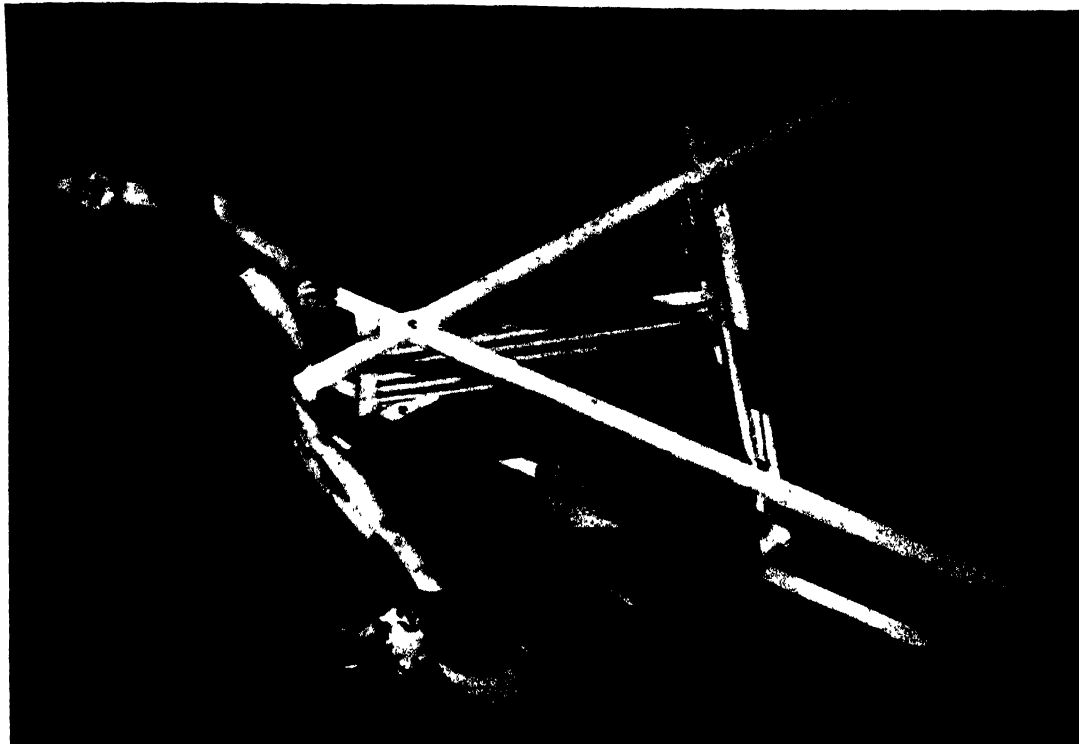


Fig. 337. "TARELKIN'S DEATH": ACTION. Mayerhold Theatre

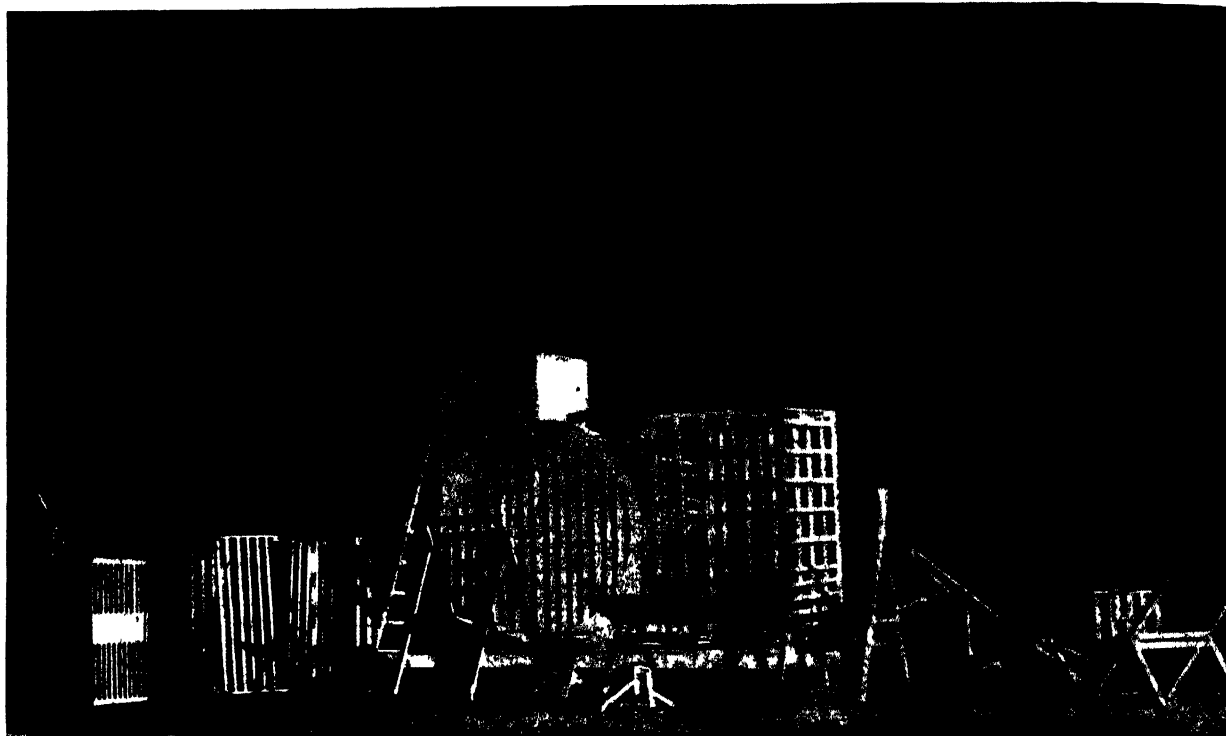


Fig 338 MACHINERY FOR 'TARELKIN'S DEATH' Mayerhold Theatre



Fig 339 SCENERY FOR "TARELKIN'S DEATH" Mayerhold Theatre



Fig 340 THE RESTIVE EARTH BACKGROUND Maychold Theatre



Fig 341 COSTUME SKETCH FOR THE MAGNIFICENT CUCKOLD Maychold Theatre

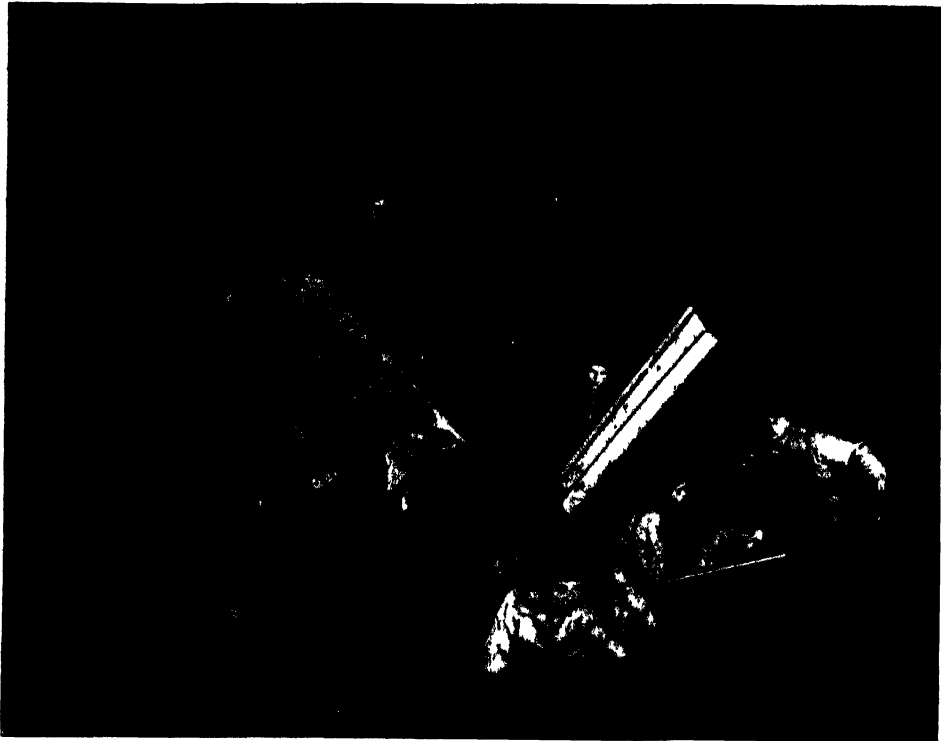


Fig. 342. "THE RESTIVE EARTH": ACTION. Mayerhold Theatre

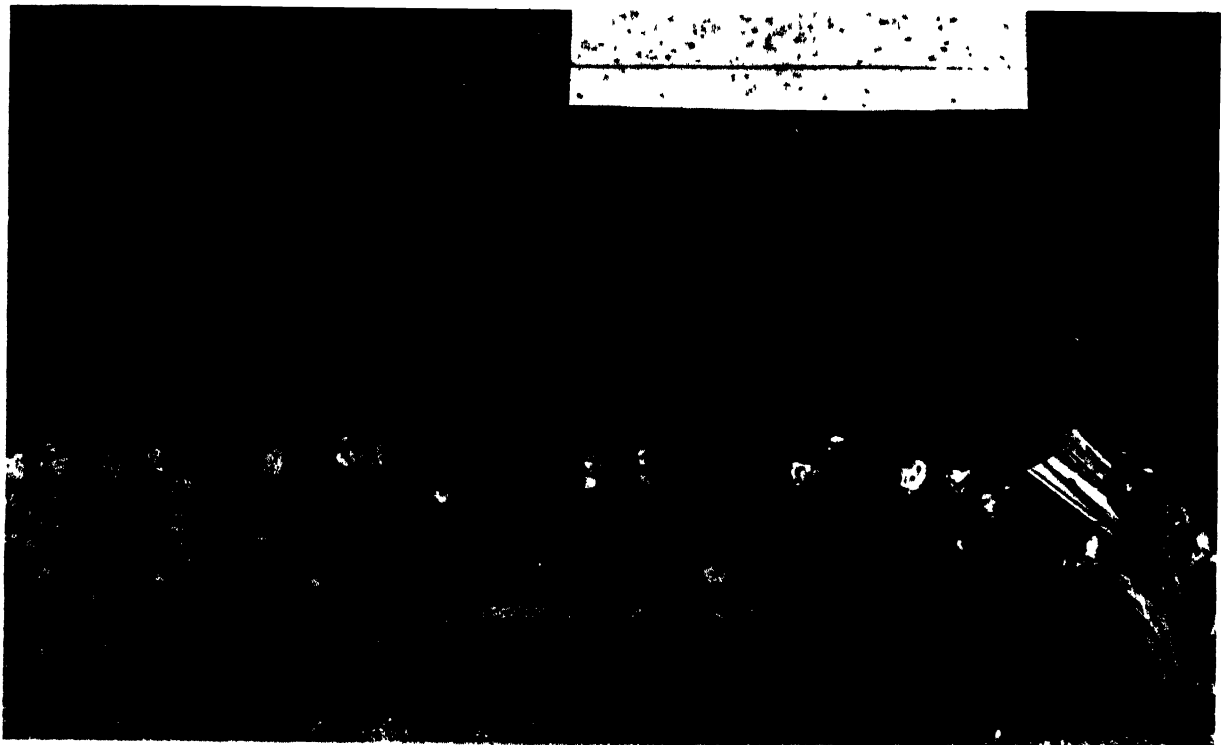


Fig. 343. SCENIC DETAIL FROM "THE RESTIVE EARTH". Mayerhold Theatre

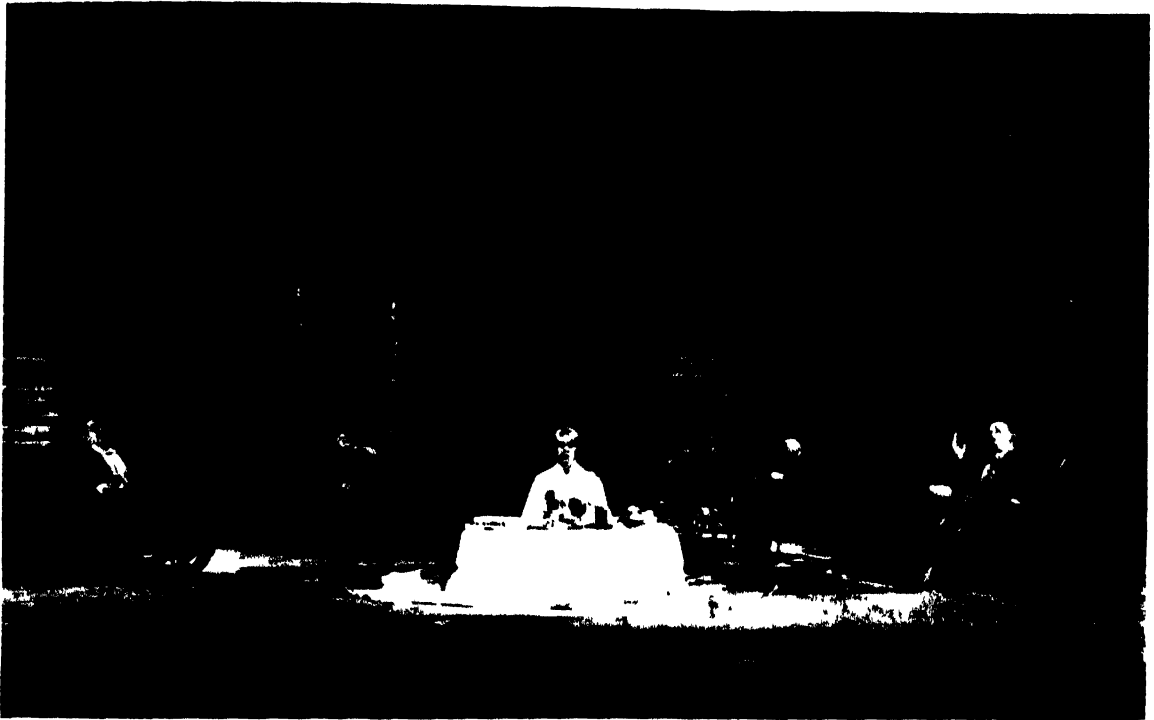


Fig. 344. SCENE FROM "D. E.", Mayerhold Theatre



Fig. 345. MOVING WALLS FOR "D. E.", Mayerhold Theatre





Fig. 346. SCENIC DETAIL FROM "D. E.". Mayerhold Theatre



Fig. 347. SCENE IN BERLIN FROM "D. E.". Mayerhold Theatre



Fig. 348. "THE RED DAWN": BEFORE THE CITY GATES. Mayerhold Theatre



Fig. 349. SCENIC DETAIL FROM "THE RED DAWN". Mayerhold Theatre

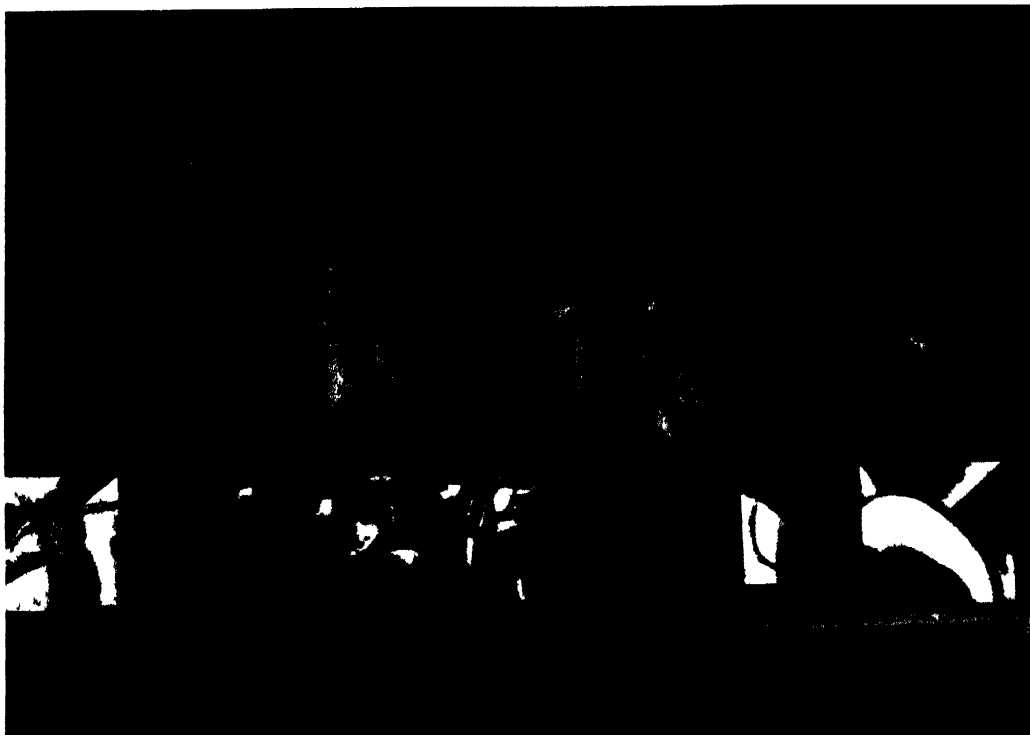


Fig. 350 THE RED DAWN ACTION Mayerhold Theatre



Fig. 351 CLOSING SCENE OF "THE RED DAWN". Mayerhold Theatre



2. SCENE FROM "THE FOREST," BY OSTROVSKY. Mayerhold Theatre. Produced 1924

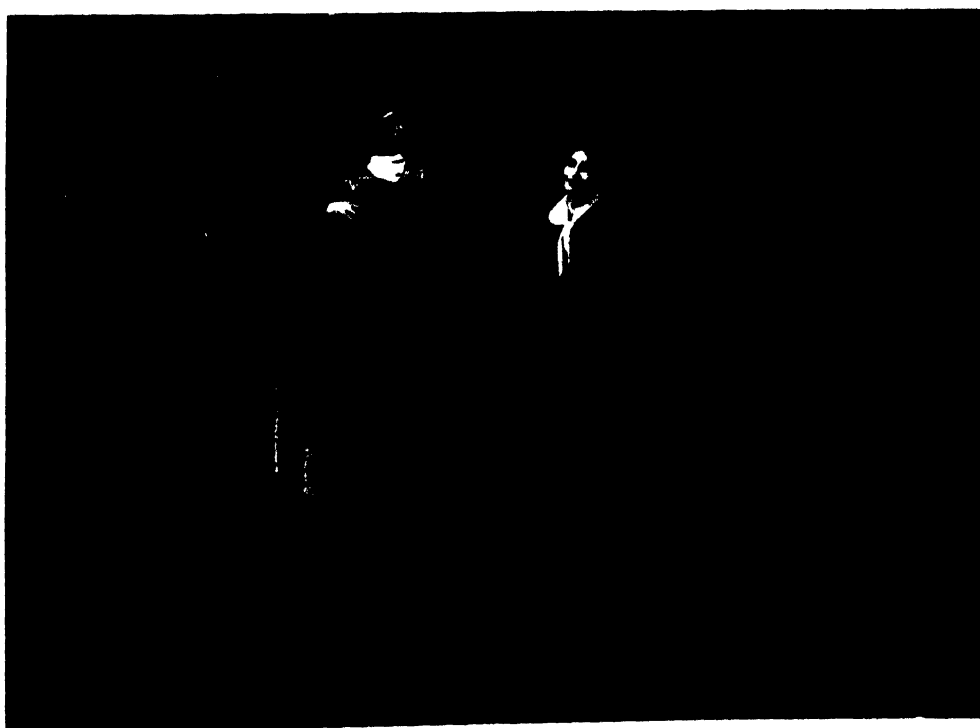


Fig. 353. "THE FOREST": PETER AND AKSIUSHA (ZENAIKL REICH). Mayerhold Theatre

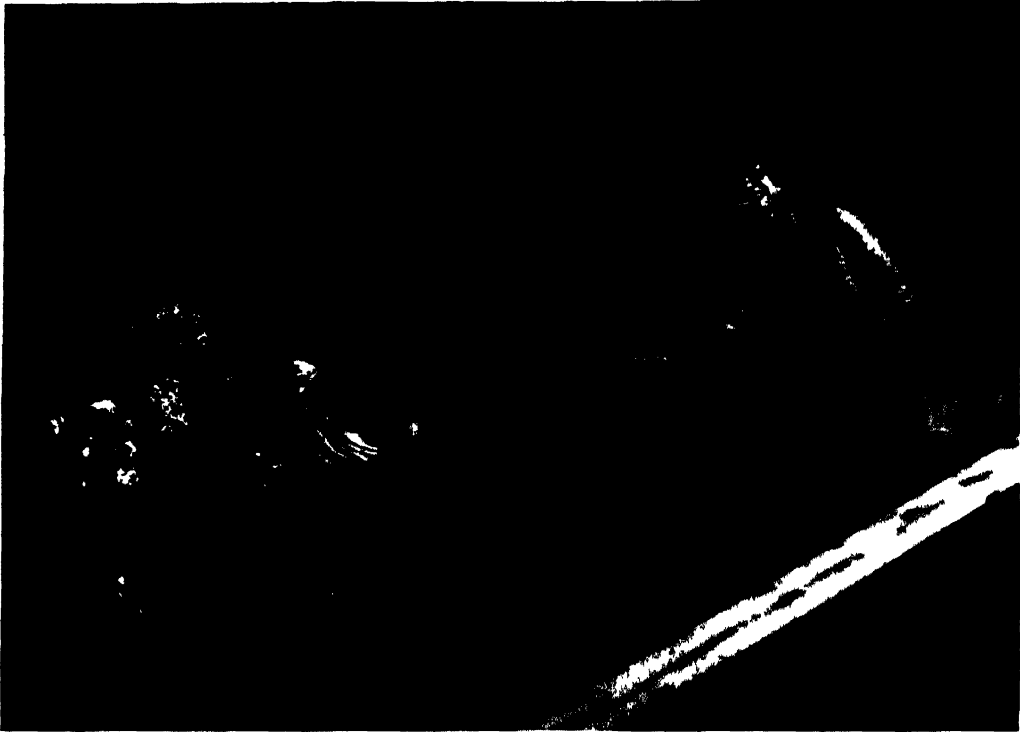


Fig. 354. "THE FOREST": ACROBATICS. Mayerhold Theatre

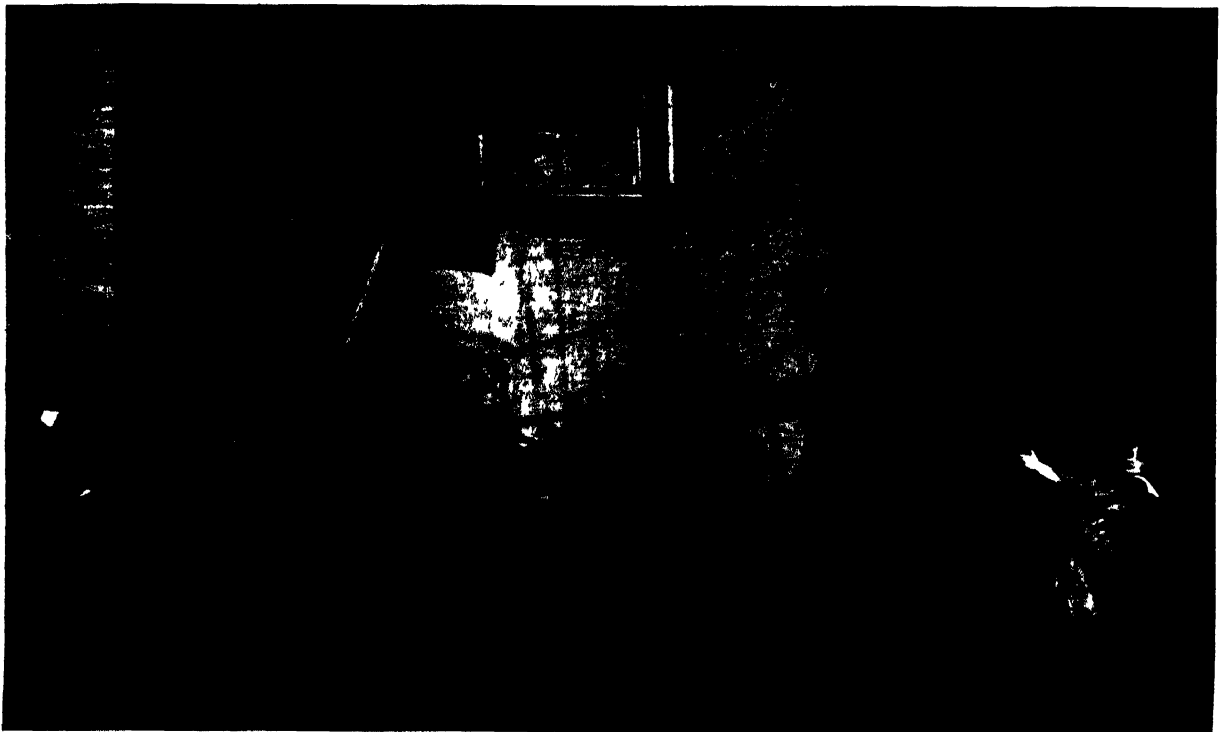


Fig. 355. "THE FOREST": PETER AND AKSIUSHA (ZENAIDE REICH)



Fig. 350. SCENE FROM "THE MANDATE," BY N. ERDMANN Mayerhold Theatre, 1925



Fig. 357. SCENIC DETAIL FROM "THE MANDATE," ACT III. Mayerhold Theatre

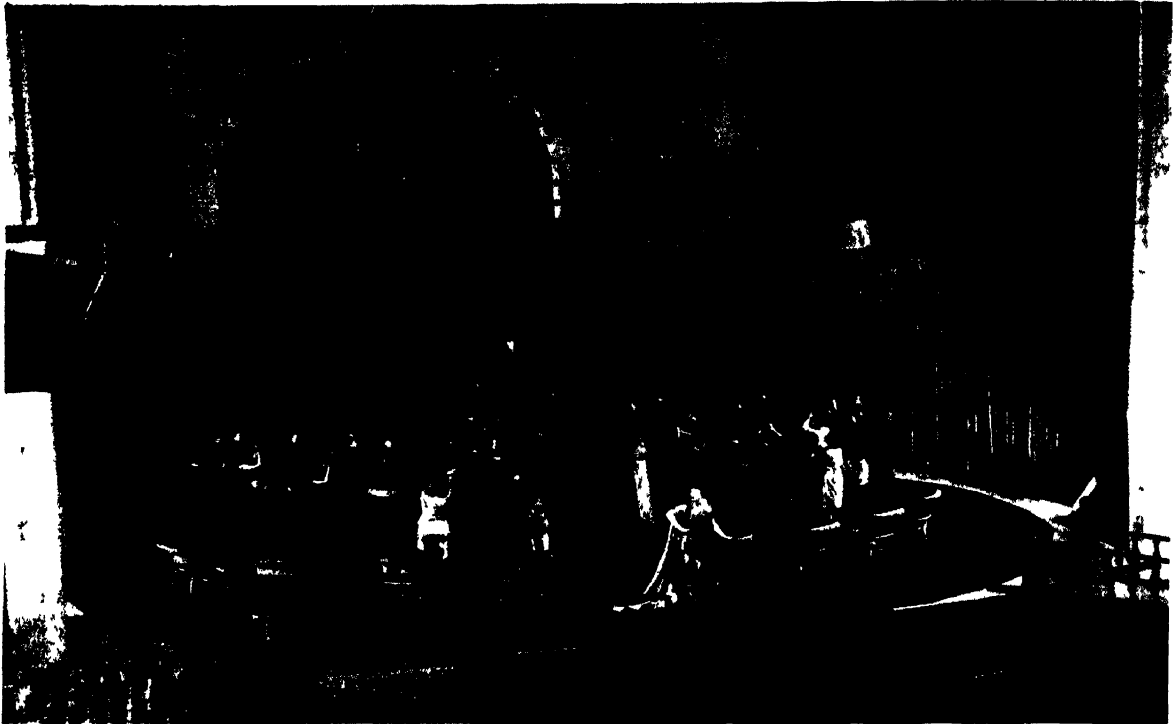


Fig 358 "BUBUS THE TEACHER," ACT III, LAST SCENE. Mayerhold Theatre

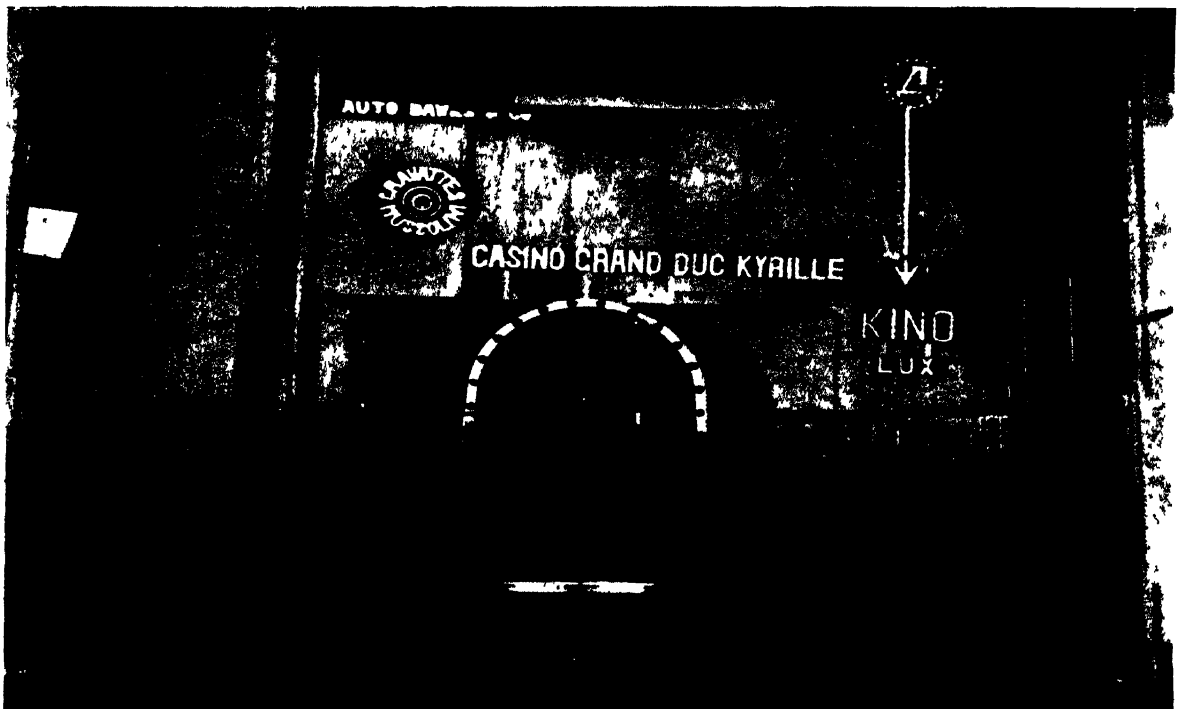


Fig. 359. SCENE FROM "BUBUS THE TEACHER". Mayerhold Theatre. By Fayko, 1925



Fig. 360. SCENIC DETAIL FROM "BUBUS THE TEACHER", Mayerhold Theatre



Fig. 361. MAX REINHARDT. SCENIC DETAIL FROM "CEPHEUS"



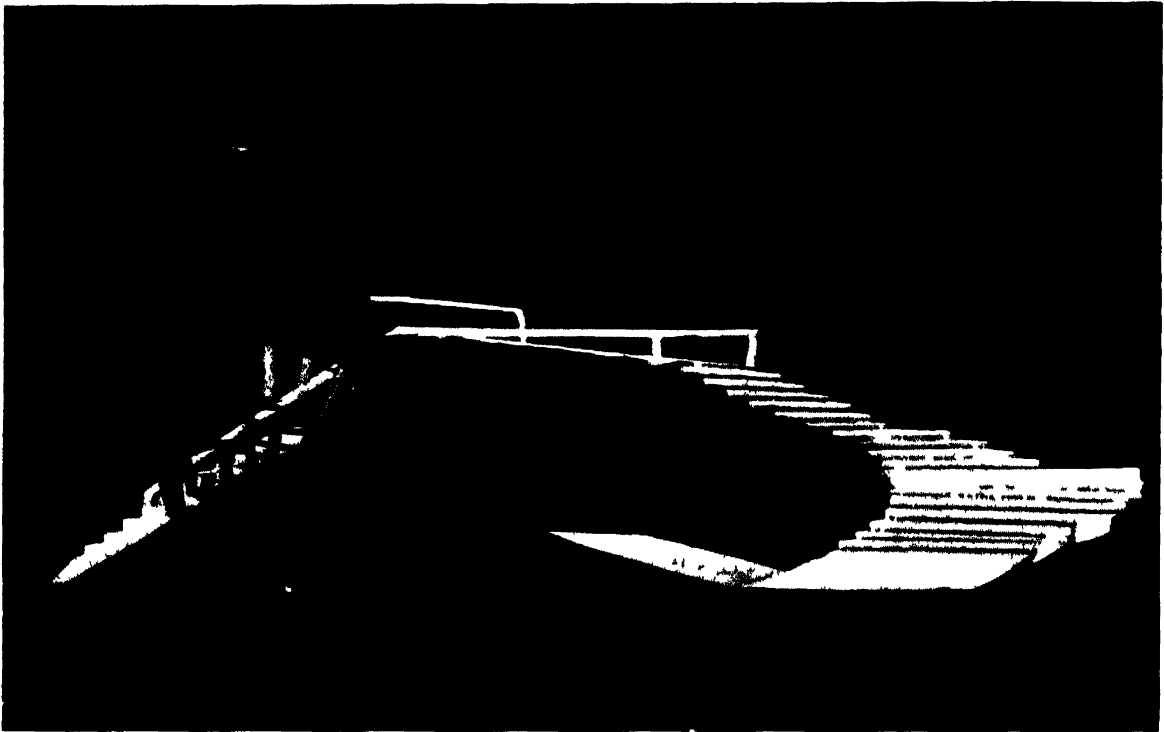


Fig 362 KARLHEINZ MARTIN MODEL OF OPEN-AIR STAGE FOR "FRANZISKA" (1923)  
*National Library, Vienna*



Fig 363 MAX REINHARDT AND NORMAN BEL-GEDDES OPEN-AIR THEATRE FOR  
 THE PERFORMANCE OF DANTE'S "DIVINA COMMEDIA"



Fig 304 THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR KULIAKOV (GARIN) AND ANNA ANDRIEVNA (ZENAIDE REICH)  
Mayerhold Theatre Arrangement in fifteen episodes by V. Mayerhold and M. Korneev  
*Model in the museum of the Theatre*



Fig 305 THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR ANNA ANDRIEVNA (ZENAIDE REICH) AND THE OFFICERS  
Mayerhold Theatre



Fig. 366. SCENE FOR ANNA ANDREIEVNA IN "THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR". Mayerhold Theatre  
*Photo by Dr Gregor, taken during the performance*



Fig. 367. SCENE FROM "THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR". Mayerhold Theatre  
*Photo by Dr Gregor, taken during the performance*

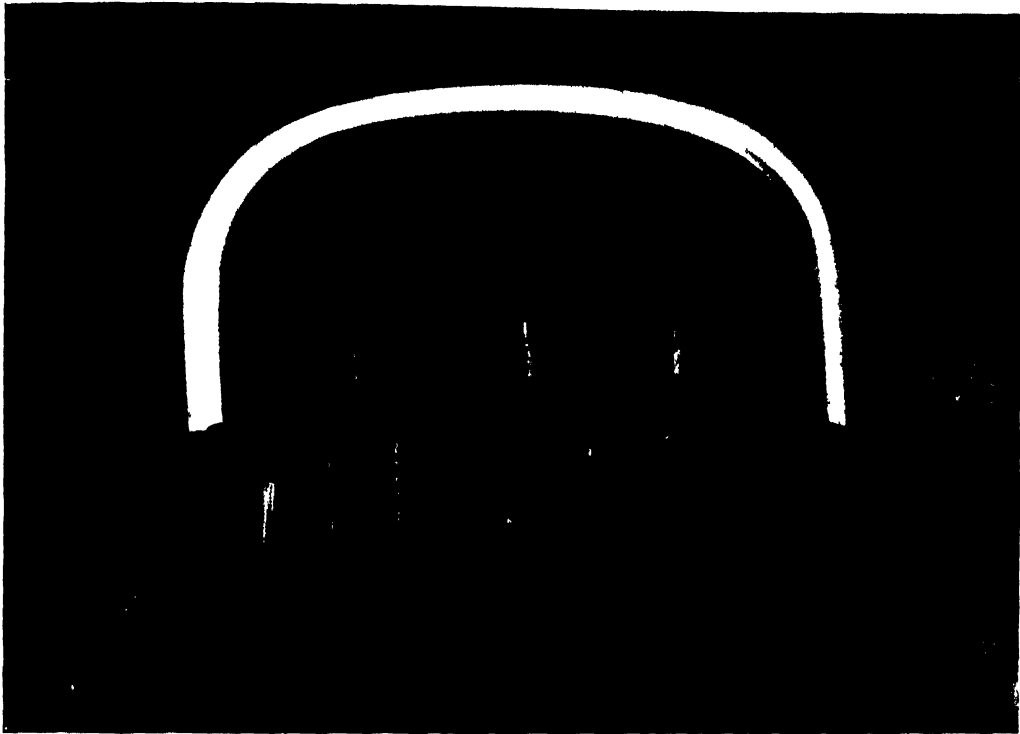


Fig. 308. SCENE FROM "THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR". Mayerhold Theatre

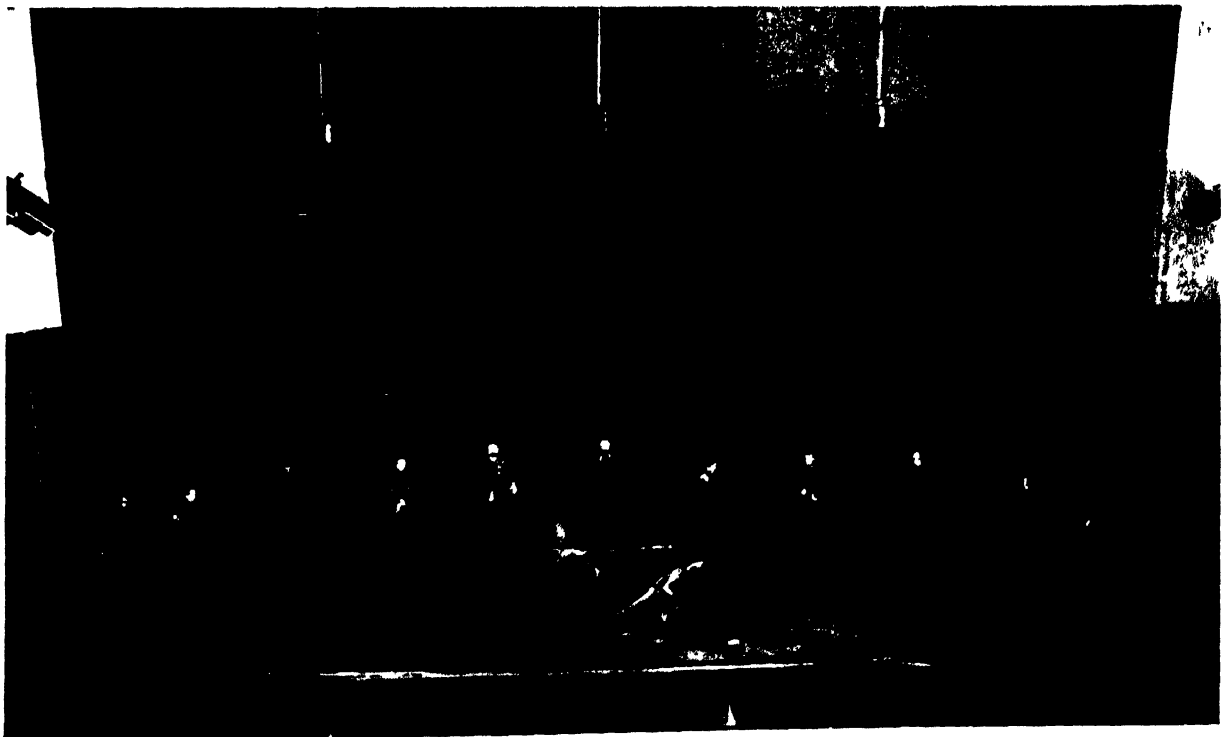


Fig. 309. BRIBERY SCENE FROM "THE GOVERNMENT INSPECTOR". Mayerhold Theatre



## **PROLETARIAN THEATRE: ACROBATS AND CLOWNS**



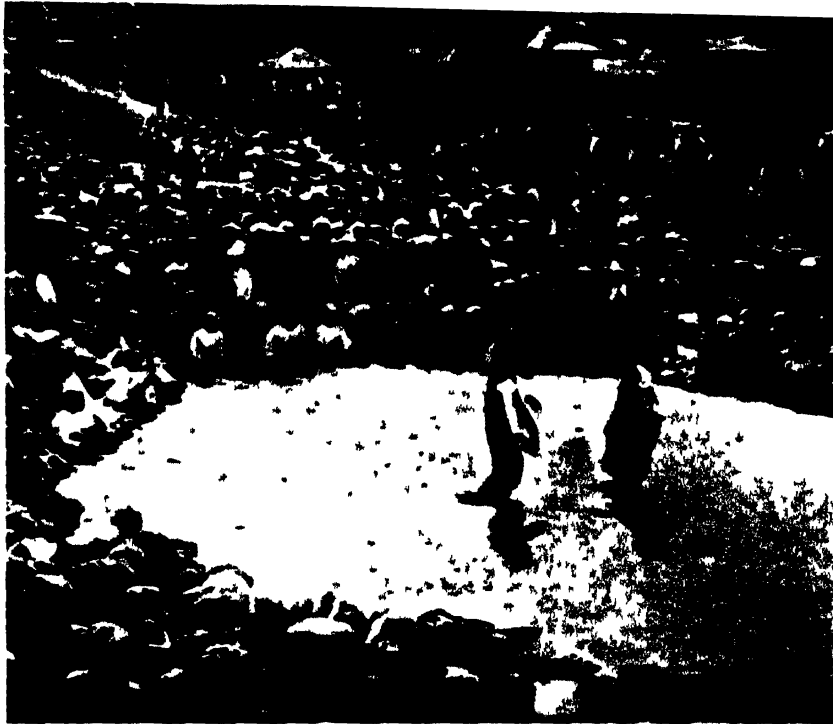


Fig 370 PRIMITIVE OPEN AIR THEATRE IN THE T.A.

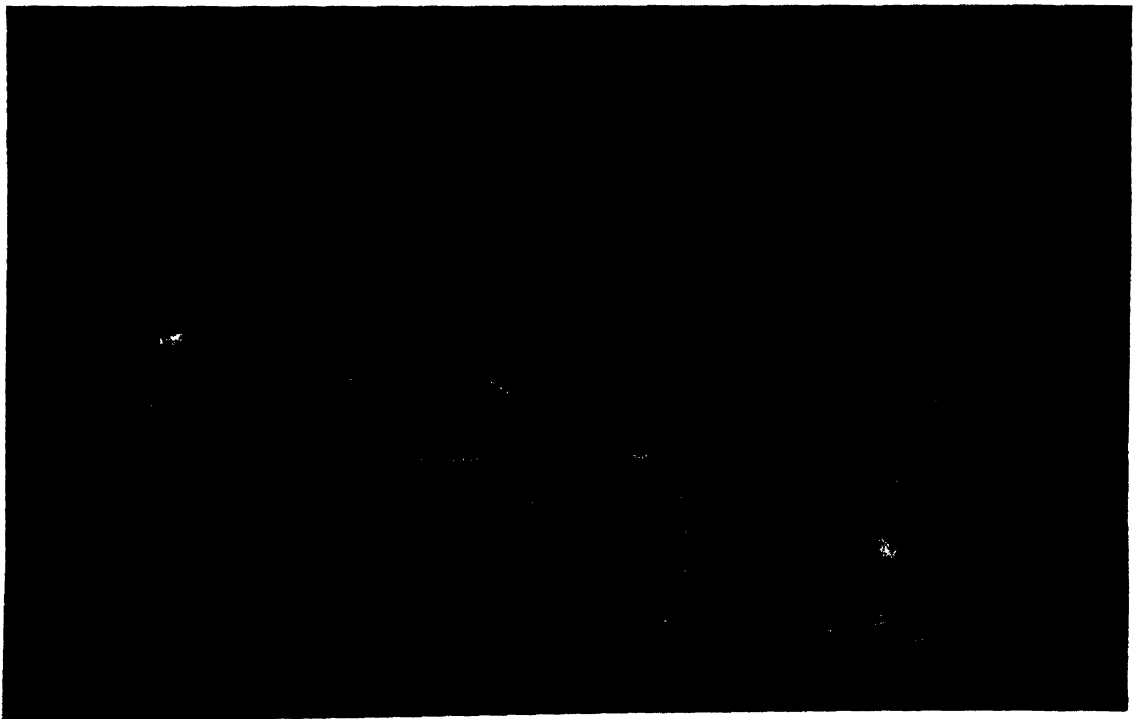


Fig 371 SCENE FROM A PLAY BY OSTROVSKY Eisenstein production



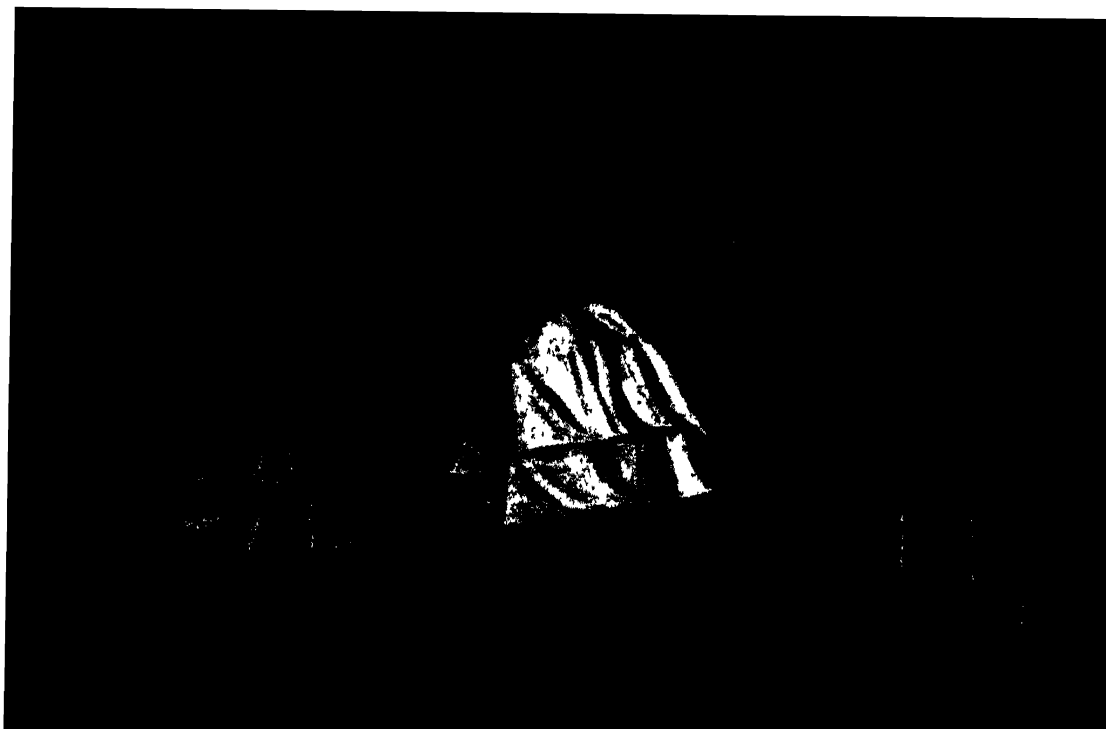


Fig. 372. SETTING OF A PIECE BY OSTROVSKY. Proletarian stage



Fig. 373. SETTING OF A PIECE BY OSTROVSKY. Proletarian stage. Arrangement of classical plays



Fig. 374. SCENE FROM "GOING ABROAD". Proletarian stage

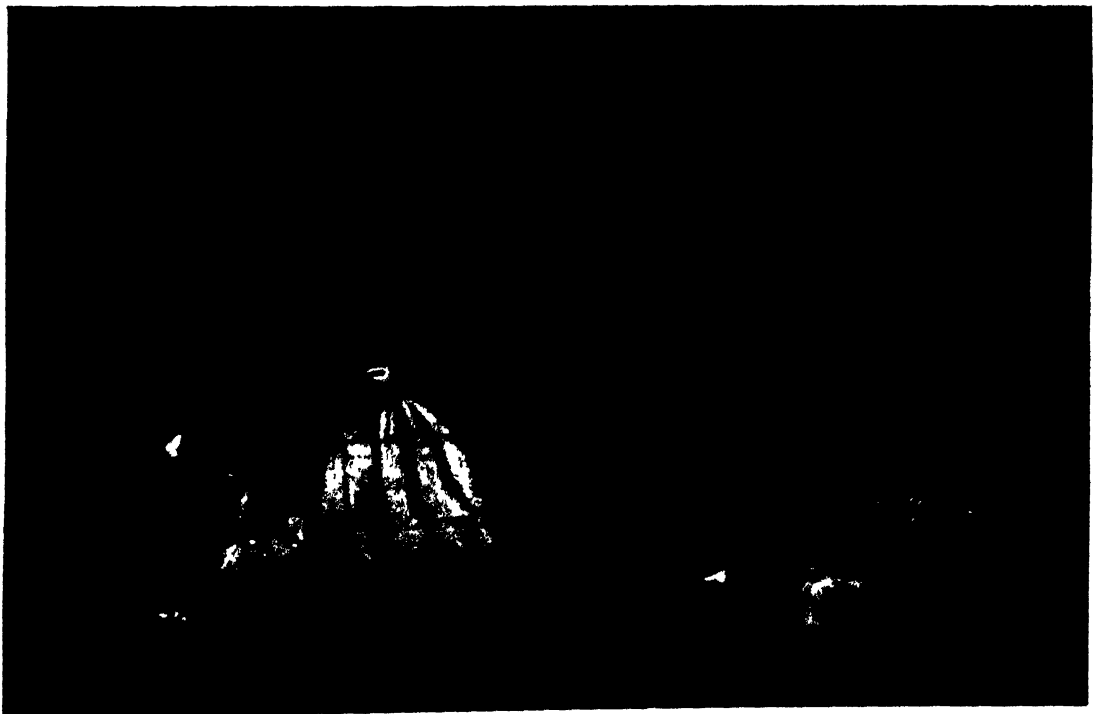


Fig. 375. CLOWNS. Eisenstein production

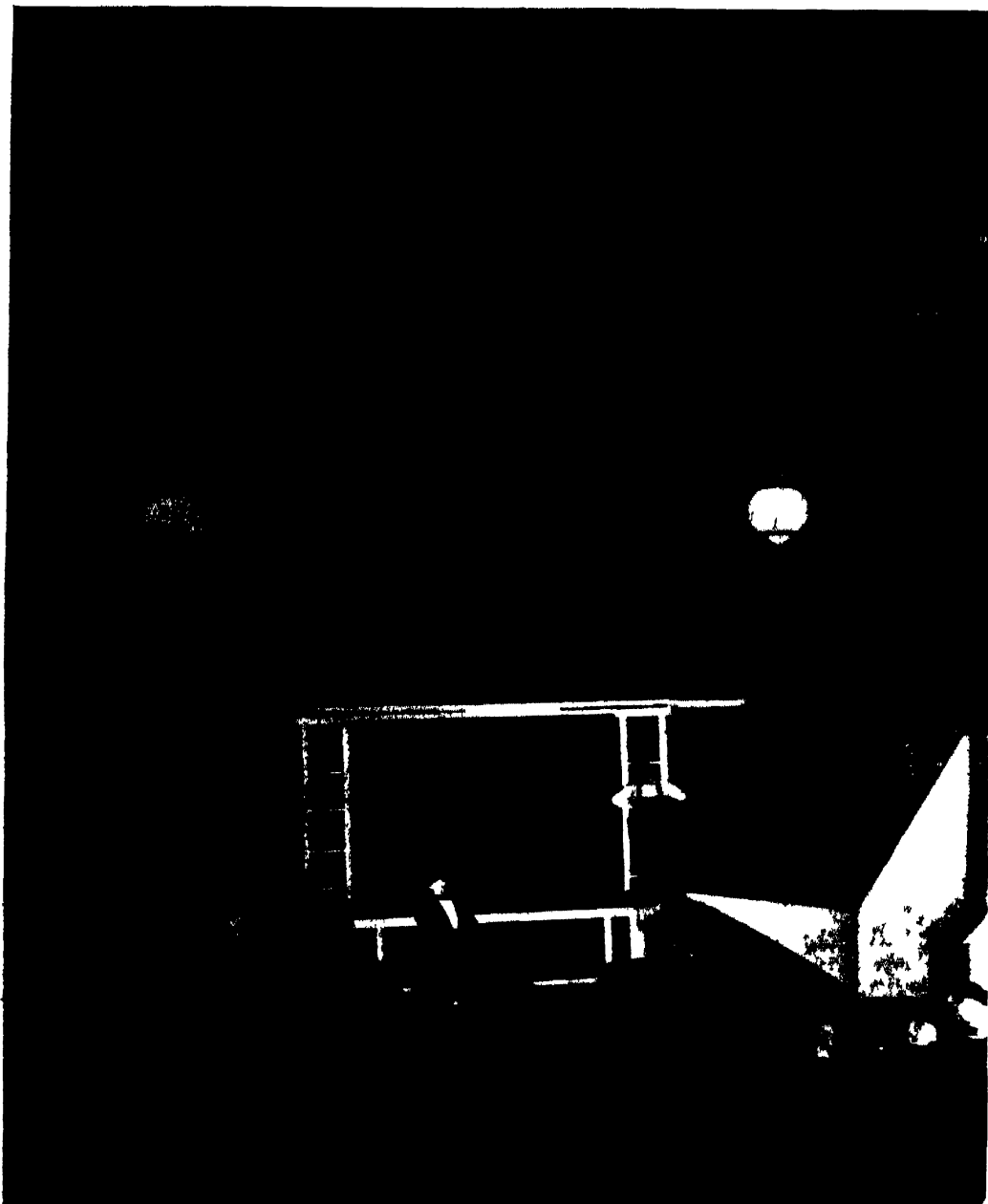


Fig 376 SUICIDE OF THE HERO Acrobatic Theatre

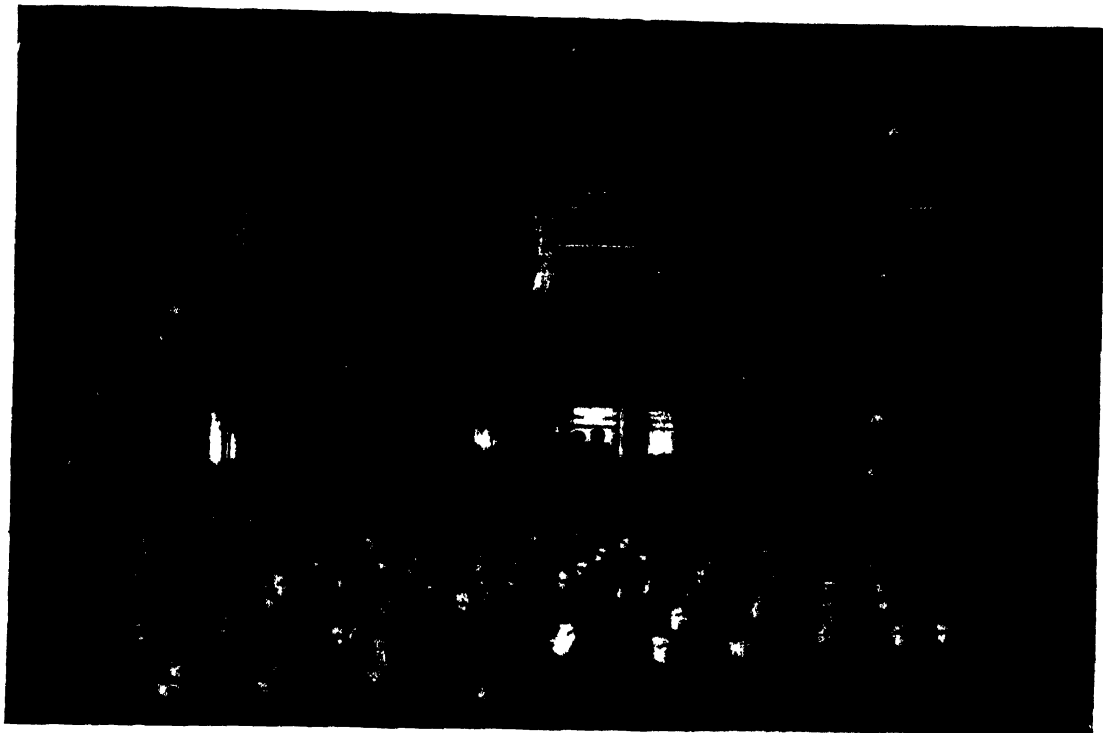


Fig 377 AUDITORIUM OF THE MARIi THEATRE



Fig 378 UKRAiNIAN WORKMEN AT A CHORAL PERFORMANCE



Fig. 379. FROM THE FILM, "THE THEFT OF THE DIARY". Eisenstein production



Fig. 380. FACTORY HANDS IN A PLAY BY MOLIÈRE

# THE MASS THEATRE





Fig. 381. "LE TRIOMPHE DU PEUPLE FRANÇAIS". Design by David. *Musée Carnavalet, Paris*





Fig 38z. DE MACHY "FÊTE DE L'ÊTRE SUPRÊME" (1794) Musée Carnavalet, Paris



Fig 133 NAUDET FETE DE L'ÊTRE SUPRÊME". Mus. e Carnatalet, Paris

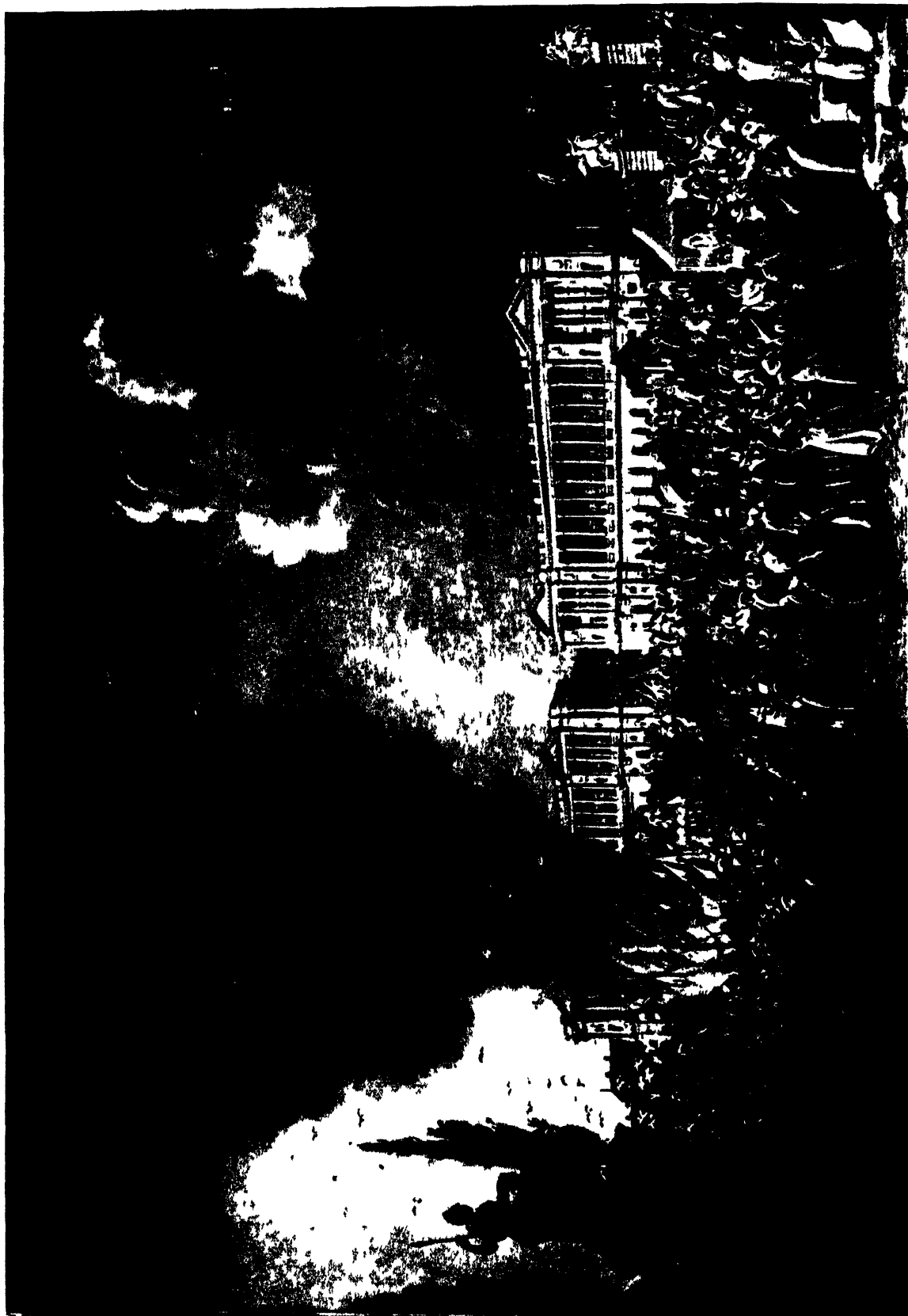


Fig 384 DE MACHY FÊTE DE L'UNITÉ. Musée Carnavalet, Paris



Fig 385 MODEL FOR THE MASS PLAYANT BATTLE AND VICTORY

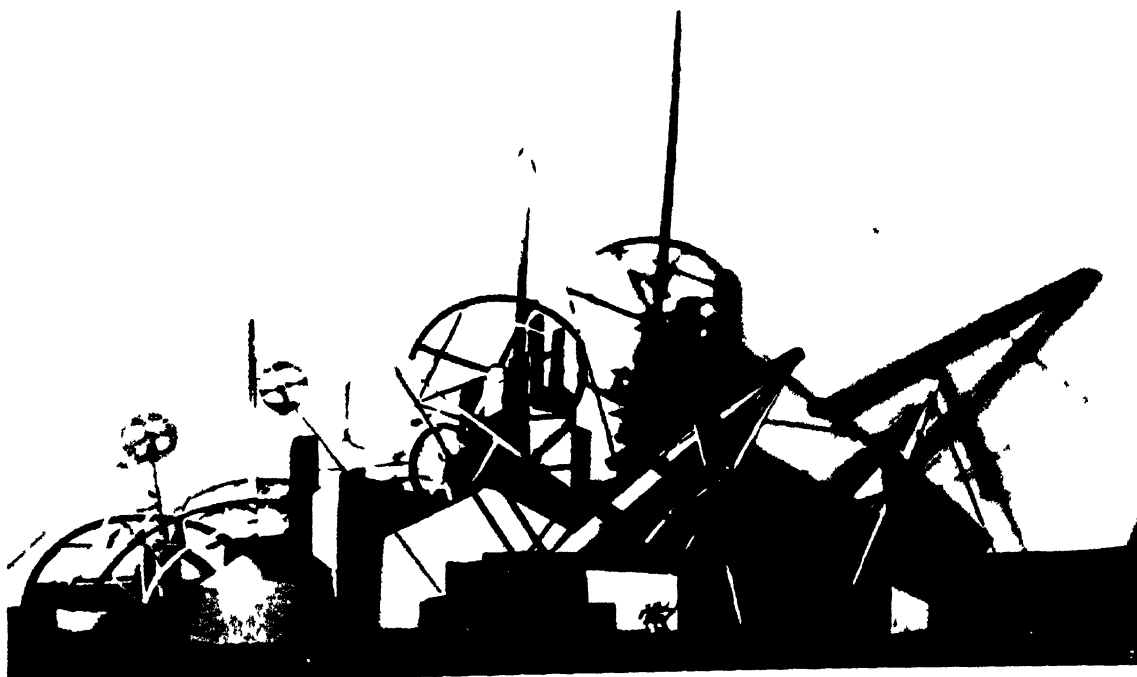


Fig 386 BATTLE AND VICTORY ANOTHER VERSION



Fig. 387. DESIGN FOR A MASS THEATRE

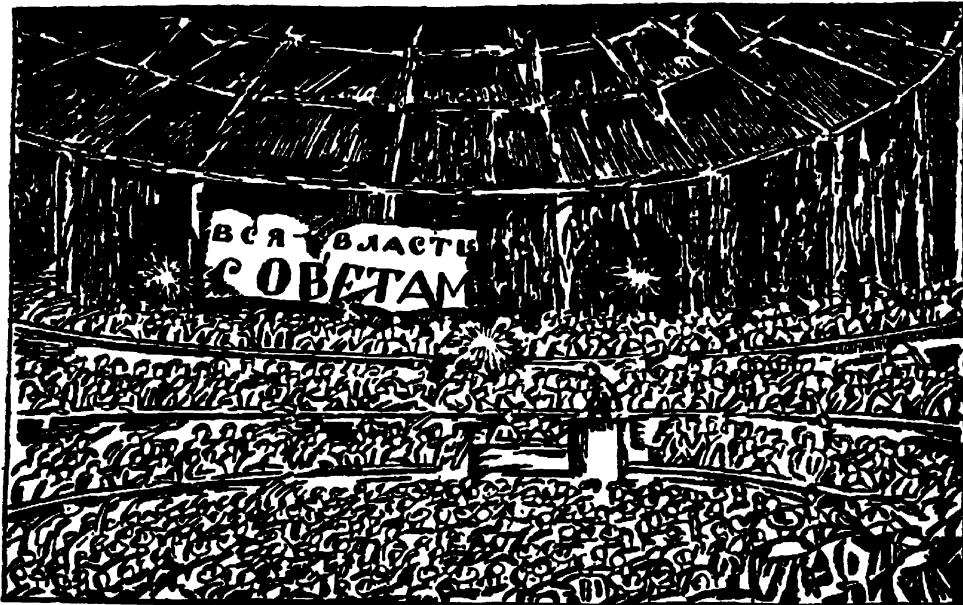


Fig. 388. A DEMONSTRATION IN THE CIRCUS



Fig 389 N LVRETSOV Drawing by Annenkov



Fig 390. ROSTRUMS IN FRONT OF THE WINTER PALACE



Fig. 391. AT WORK ON THE ROSTRUMS

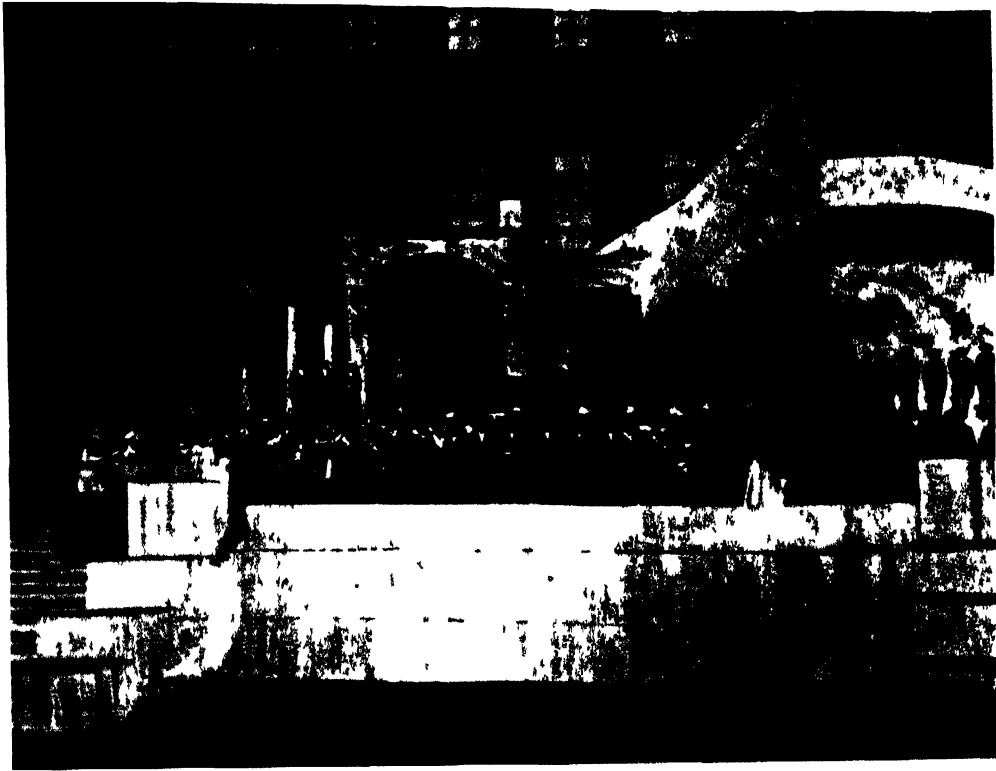


Fig 392 DRAMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE STORMING OF THE WINTER PALACE THE WHITE ROSTRUM

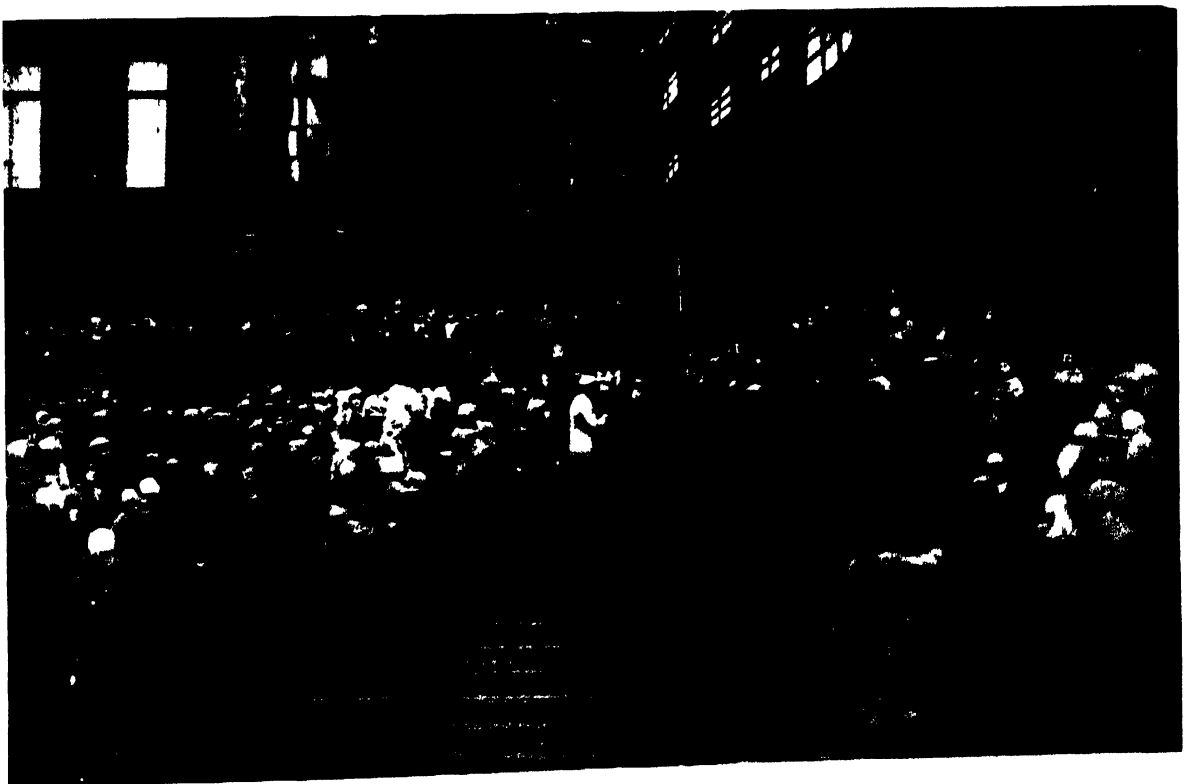


Fig 393 THE "RED" ROSTRUM





Fig 394 THE "WHITE" ROSTRUM

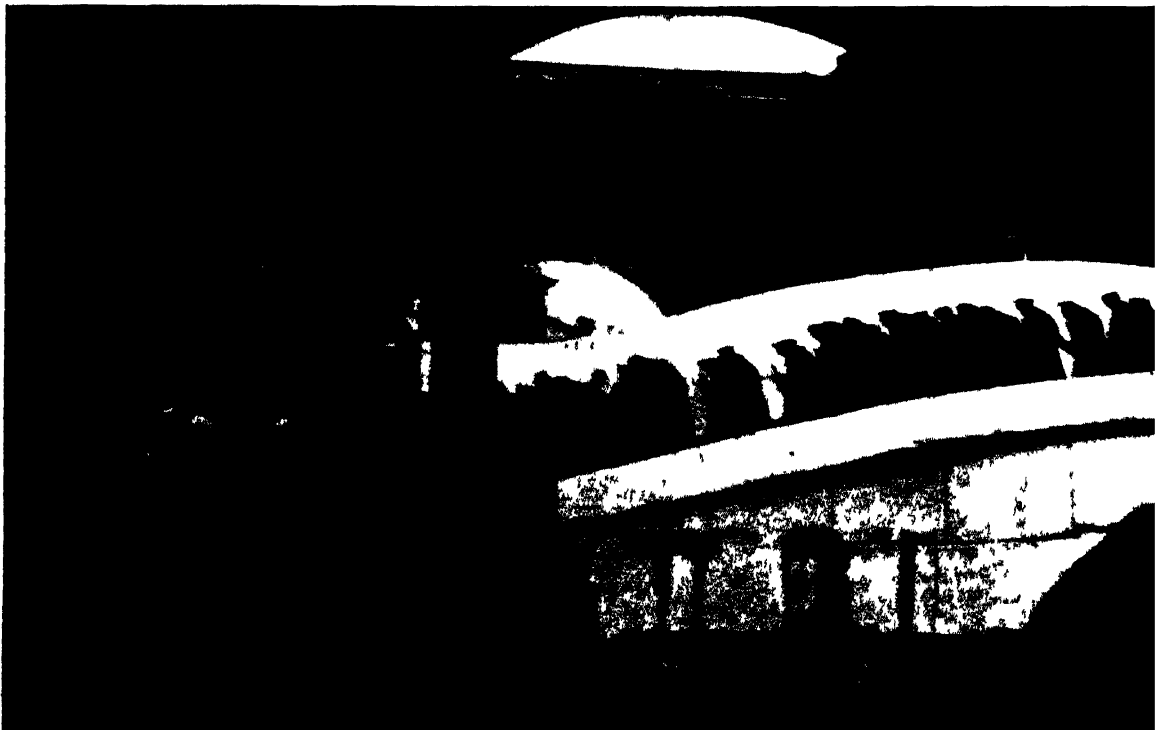


FIG 305 BRIDGE CONNECTING THE TWO ROSTRUMS



Fig 396 TROOPS DEFENDING BEFORE THE GROUND



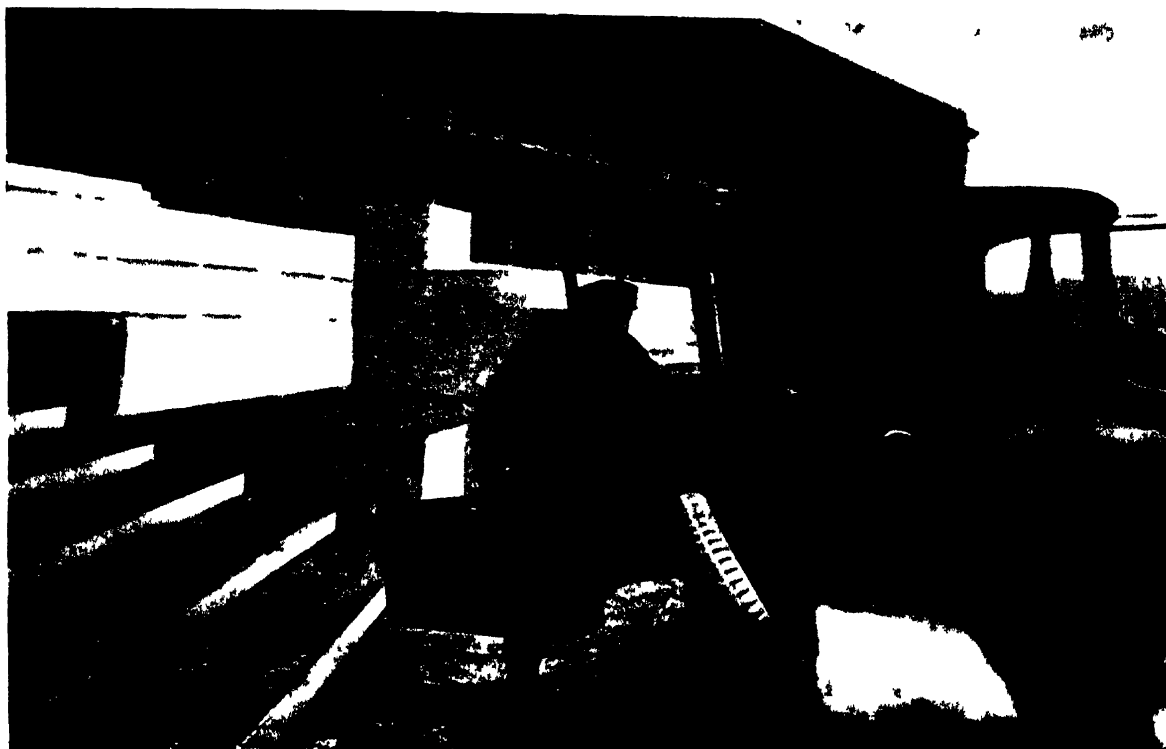
Fig 397 DEFENDING ON THE GROUND



Fig. 398. THE BOURGEOISIE



Fig. 399. THE WOMEN'S BATTALION



KERENSKY'S FLIGHT



Fig 401 ATTACK BY RED TROOPS

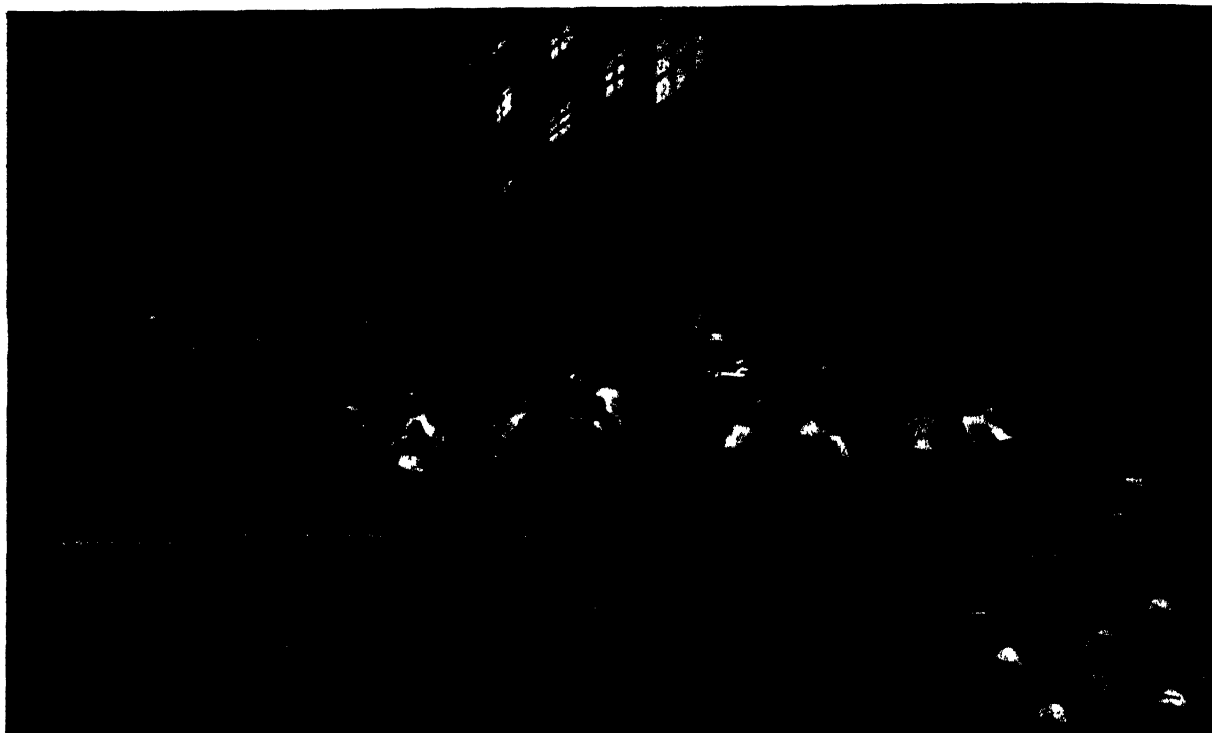


Fig. 402. THE DECISIVE BATTLE



Fig. 403. VICTORIOUS MILITARY CARS



Fig 404 IHLATRICAL EXHIBITION IN MOSCOW



Fig. 405. EXHIBITION OF THEATRICAL ART